



Partner Church 2019 Visit



In the summer of 2019, nine members of First Unitarian Church of Providence began a journey to our partner Church in Szentegyhaza/Vlahita. The travelers included, Rev. Liz Lerner Maclay, Cheryl and Neil Bartholomew, Richard Boober, Betty Finn, Odile Mattiauda, Andrea Merman, Peter Phipps and Tom Getz.

Transylvania is the historical name of the area we are visiting. According to custom, cities may have three names, one in Romanian, one in German and one in Hungarian. Throughout this article we will mention the Hungarian name followed by the Romanian name.

The group gathered in Romania in the Transylvanian city of Kolozsvár / Cluj Napoca, which houses the headquarters of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania. In the morning after we gathered, we visited the Unitarian Headquarters to see the historic Consistory room and learn how the Church is organized and governed. In the afternoon we visited St. Michael's Church where Francis David once preached.





We then proceeded to Marosvásárhely/ Târgu Mureș. While in the city, we visited the Teleki-Bolyai Library which is a historic public library and current museum in the town. The picture on the left is a 1687 first edition of Newton's "The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy" which defined the laws of motion and other principles. This museum has one of the richest Transylvanian collections of cultural artifacts in the country. We also visited the Cultural Palace, which is a remarkable Art Nouveau edifice that houses the state philharmonic. On glass panes are beautifully painted and illustrated sequences from Hungarian legends.

On the way to Segesvár we stopped at a roadside memorial which commemorates a WWII massacre of the local Jews. At the medieval fortress town of Segesvár we walked around and saw some of the historical towers that were fortified by the guilds. This is the hometown of Vlad Tepes. He was a ruthless ruler in Walachia in the late 1400's also known as Vlad Dracul.



On Thursday, we drove to Szekelyudvarhely to visit First Unitarian's partner Church in the 1920's. While at their church Rev. Liz met with their minister, Rev. Sandor Simo and Rev Kelemen from Szentegyhaza. Before snacks and tea, we met with some of their congregation and presented them copies of letters we received from their congregation in the 1920's and 1930's. Based on this relationship they sent us a beautiful Baptismal cloth in the 1930's that still hangs in the Parish House. After this visit to our first partner church, we headed to Szentegyhaza.

As our bus rolled into our partner church, we were all getting excited to meet our new hosts. When we arrived at their church there was a small delegation from their congregation who met us. Our hosts provided us with tasty delights which included a bit of palinka, which is their fruit flavored brandy. Our group members were introduced to their host families. In most cases the hosts either spoke some English or may have made arrangements to have a friend or relative stop by to make communication easier. In addition, our translator, Magda, from the UUPCC went to one of the host families to assist in translation. That night we all were treated to dinner with our new hosts and had the opportunity to start to get to know each other.





On Friday, after breakfast we gathered at the church to start our visit of Szentegyhaza. Our first stop was the local museum that presented historical artifacts from past centuries of village life. We would normally visit the high school, but they were taking exams and we bypassed that site. We then travelled to the Szentegyhaza museum/hostel.

Szentegyhaza is honored to have an extremely talented musical instructor.

He personally teaches choral music and can play at least ten instruments that he teaches his students. This choir is very talented and has recorded CDs and travelled throughout Europe. The building has a performance stage and also a hostel on the upper floors where tourists can stay when they visit Szentegyhaza. The upper floor also houses a collection of historical clothing, armaments and currency.



The group then travelled to a Homoródfürdő which is in a rural area that is known for its springs/spas. We visited a roadside store where local hand-made foods and clothing were available for sale. We then hiked to a home in the woods where we had lunch and learned more about the area. After lunch we were bussed to a local brewery where we were instructed in the fine art of beer making. After a wonderful meal of ham hocks baked in bread, we were transported to Korond,

which is a town noted for its ceramics and wooden art. The day was coming to an end and we all went to our homes for possibly another meal. As you can see, food is a big part of the experience.

On Saturday we gathered, after breakfast, and headed to the town of Kőrispatak (Criseni), which is home of a straw museum. This village has maintained itself by keeping the craft of making of straw hats, ornaments and other objects alive. The methods used are time-honored and this art would not be alive if the people did not continue this tradition.



After lunch, we drove to Bözöd (Bezid), where a number of villages were destroyed by the Ceausescu regime when a dam was built. Each one of the kopyafas (the wooden memorial posts, on the left) represents a home that was flooded.

Bözöd has an interesting history. Beginning at the end of the 16th century, Bözöd was one of the main centers of the so-called Sabatarians, Christians who observed Jewish festivals, rituals, sanitation and dietary requirements. This group suffered persecutions in the 17-18th centuries. After the 1869 civil emancipation of Jews in Hungary and Transylvania, the Sabatarians

converted to Judaism. In May 1944, they chose to be deported together with the Jews to Auschwitz and not return to Christianity.

We returned to our hosts in Szentegyhaza for a quite evening. Each evening Rev. Kelemen and his wife Eniko, invited people from our congregation and his to gather for a meal. The discussions were interesting and was a good chance for each of us to learn more about each other. The discussions were unscripted and could cover any topic including family, politics, religion or any other topic that interested people.



On Sunday, people in the Village heard the peeling of the Unitarian Church's bell tower that our own Richard Boober rang. Services began at 11 and it was a joint service with Rev Liz and Rev Kelemen taking part of the service. Our translator provided the assistance needed for both congregations to understand both minister's sermons.



After the service, gifts were presented to both our church and theirs. Cheryl received the beautiful embroidered altar cloth from their Women's Association. Our congregation provided them with a portable audio system that can be used for outdoor services. Members of our congregation were given a number of hand-carved wooden plaques.



We then all then gathered to their outdoor gazebo where we were served lunch and refreshments. After lunch was finished, we started a sing along. Neil Bartholomew led our group in a song that was then followed by one from their congregation. The singing went on for over an hour and was enjoyed by all.

After lunch our group broke up, some people went with their hosts, others took walks and some even learned to milk a cow. Our last night in Szentegyhaza was a restful one. We had covered a lot of ground both physically and in our understanding of our partners in Transylvania.



On Monday morning, after we all said farewells to our friends, we left Szentegyhaza with heavy hearts. We then traveled to the nearby Saxon fortress of Viscri. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The white fortified church, went through three construction phases starting in the beginning of the 12th century.

After lunch we continued on to Nagyszeben (Sibiu). We spent a day and a half exploring Sibiu. It is known for its Germanic architecture in its old town and is the legacy of 12th-century Saxon settlers. Nicknamed *the City with Eyes*, it is a well-known tourist destination for both domestic and



foreign visitors. Known for its culture, history, gastronomy and its diverse architecture, which includes its much iconic houses with eyes that gave Sibiu its nickname,



On Wednesday we stopped at the 13th -century fairytale Corvin Castle located in [Hunedoara](#). This Gothic-Renaissance castle is one of the largest castles in Europe and figures in lists of the Seven Wonders of Romania. It comes complete with a drawbridge over the rushing Zlaști River serving as a moat and 30m thick stone walls built on old Roman fortifications.

From there we drove to [Déva/Deva](#). This site is an important part of the Unitarian religion. The Unitarian faith is a product of the Reformation. Francis David challenged the idea of the Trinity of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Unlike most European states, 16th century Transylvania had created a sphere of tolerance for this belief.

On January 20th, 1565, David gave his first sermon about Unitarianism in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in St. Michael's church. By 1572, the ideas of the Unitarian belief were crushed by the next ruler who passed an act against the Unitarian Reformation. The main purpose of the act was aimed at David who stressed the human nature of Jesus Christ and was opposed to his divinity. He was sentenced to life imprisonment at the fortress of Deva and died there on November 15, 1579. While at the ruins the group conducted a service to honor the life of Francis David.



The next day we drove to the restored royal city of Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia, to tour the 1000-year-old church and visit the tombs of the Unitarian King, Sigismund, and his mother, Isabella.

Earlier when he was a prince John Sigismund, who converted to the Unitarian faith, convened the Diet of Torda. This assemblage of nobles and landed gentry in January 1568 ended up promulgating the Edict of Religious Tolerance which called for religious freedom and conscience and allowed for different faiths. We then drove to Torda where the famous Edict was formed over 450 years ago.

We returned to Kolozsvár / Cluj Napoca where we started the journey. We had one last meal together where we dined with Juli Jobbagy, the assistant minister of the Koloszar Unitarian Church. We had a spirited discussion of the gay marriage controversy that was being played out in their Church. She said there was a generational divide on this issue. She was hopeful that as time went on, the attitudes will change on this important topic. It should be noted she was only one of nine ministers who voted that marriage was not just between a man and a woman.



The next day we all headed our own way back home. It was an interesting trip. There were many opportunities to get to know each other better. We absorbed a lot about the history of Romania/Transylvania. Most of all we all learned a lot about the roots of the Unitarian religion and also came back to America with a better appreciation for our relatives across the ocean.