

UUAA Partner Church Program Annual Report for 2016

Submitted by

Phyllis Valentine, Chair

In 1997 the UU Church of Ann Arbor formally voted to establish a formal partnership arrangement with the Unitarian Church in Kézdivásárhely, Romania. Our partner church has approximately 100 members, with about one-third of them active. This program supports all 5 core values of our congregation: spiritual life, social justice, community, stewardship, and culture. We share many of the same values as our partners, although there are variations in the way we practice our religions and both partners learn from each other.

We have accomplished two of the goals set out for the past year: increased communication and continued financial support. Rev. István Buzogány-Csoma and his wife, also a minister, continue to provide both formal and informal information about his two congregations' activities. Communication has been greatly enhanced through use of Facebook by those who travelled to Transylvania in 2014. This has enabled us to form a more informed and interested group in Ann Arbor. We have used that group to discuss potential visitors and assist with decisions. We have published several UUAA Newsletter articles about our partners.

We continued our financial assistance for a University student (Lestyan Attila), the Kezdi congregation's building search, and for the minister. Attila wrote an article about his studies for the March 2016 Newsletter. One goal that was not realized was the visit here by a Kezdi congregant. Our plans to bring Lestyan Ildiko here in Fall 2015 were cancelled because of personal issues. Another plan, to bring Zsolt and Emilia Miklos here in Spring 2016, was cancelled because of his current work schedule.

We did seek ways to establish communication between youth programs. I participated in two telephone conferences regarding them and shared the information with the leader of YRUU. I think that this communication might begin only if we had youth on a pilgrimage to Transylvania.

Beginning in November 2015 we had another goal: to coordinate our activity with the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Blacksburg, Virginia, the new partner of Rev. Istvan's village congregation in Szentivanlaborfalva. I have had both email and telephone conversations with the leader of their partner church program, Peter Lazar. We have talked about sharing a visit from both Rev. Istvan and his wife Csilla; now that our previous visiting plans have fallen through we will investigate how this could be accomplished in Fall 2016. Our thought to develop links between children's programs however was dependent on the contribution of the village church; since the Kezdi congregation has no children, this is no longer a goal for us.

Our goals for the coming year are:

- Collaborate with the Blacksburg, VA congregation to bring Rev. Istvan and his wife Csilla to the United States for a visit in Fall 2016
- Work with our ministers to plan and execute a Partner Church Service during Rev. Istvan's visit in order to build on the visibility of this program in the wider congregation.
- Continue regular communication with our partners via Facebook and other means, especially as they develop plans for a church building of their own.
- Continue to engage this year's and previous travelers in conversations about the partnership.