

Pastoral letter to all congregations from Bishop Ferenc Bálint-Benczédi

June 29, 2010
Kolozsvár

To our Unitarian believers and brethren of other denominations:

This past Sunday, as we were preparing to go to church with gratitude to God, we were shocked to receive the horrifying news. It caused us both pain and bewilderment to find out about the terrible crime committed by the pastor of our congregation in Medgyes. As a Unitarian minister and as a church member, my soul was tried by hearing the news. This widely publicized event evokes many questions in us both as individuals and as a community.

I write these words with the belief that God is near us even in such trying times, only we don't know how to look for him. Our forebears had succeeded in finding their way out of severe circumstances. In case our faith in God has been weakened or we have lost the path shown us by the exemplary lives of our ancestors, let us hear the prophet's message: "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

One individual's actions are not the actions of the community. However, this event casts its shadow on all of us. Of course, we do not disown a minister of our church who has served three different congregations over ten years. And we certainly do not disown a family man who has shown exceptional devotion in raising his children and seeking a cure for his terminally ill wife. We regret enormously that this heavy burden that required superhuman strength to bear caused a nervous breakdown in him. This man, who had received psychiatric care for his illness, did not take those lives in his position as a minister. His deeds reach far beyond the life of our church and are considered explicitly criminal acts. While we stood by him, aided him financially and followed his tribulations as his fellow servants, we cannot bear the responsibility for the horrible murders he committed. One individual's actions are not the actions of the community, but this event casts its shadow on all of us.

Many press sources have been objective in reporting on the immeasurable tragedy that befell this family, and we hereby express our gratitude to them. However, the scandal-craving tabloid media and the public opinion it manipulates have attempted to judge our entire community based on this event. Being Unitarian will become difficult in the coming days and weeks, and it may remain so for a long while. Some people may ridicule or slander us. Others may attempt to associate our faith with ideas we have never espoused.

We need the strength and sobriety of our religious community now more than ever before. This community consists of us, of each individual person. Let us stand by one another and our faith. Together, let us expect the blessing of our providing God, which we can experience even in the darker days of our lives. Let us remember that our forebears made difficult but sustaining sacrifices for this precious faith, in order that they may pass it on to us. Let us remember the pure

and simple faith of our cherished Unitarian religion that has always compelled us to love God and serve people. Over four and a half centuries, our church has enriched humanity with immeasurable values. Let us ensure that this legacy lives on.

Together, let us pray for the tried but strong congregation in Medgyes; for our shaken believers; for the minister's wife mourning her children and husband. Let us implore our eternal, one true God to dwell amongst us with his providence and power, compelling us to do what is right. May God protect our physical and mental health, send us help in our illnesses, and defend us from family and community tragedies. May God give us spiritual strength so we can stand firm beside those in need. With our godly lives, let us prove that we are brothers and sisters, children of God.

May the love of God remain among us.

Bishop Ferenc Bálint-Benczédi