

MLUC July 2008 trip preparation

Our trip was open to the entire congregation as part of our celebration of the Main Line Unitarian Church's 50th Anniversary. Of the 22 travelers only 2 were members of the partner church committee. Five of us had been to Transylvania previously. Ages ranged from 8 years (with his father) to 80 and included two unaccompanied teenagers.

The goal was to see the historical Unitarian sites and visit our partner church community for five days. I wanted to facilitate a feeling of pilgrimage and deepen our partnership relationship and not just have a nice cultural/educational trip. The group's limited knowledge of Unitarian history; the partnership program and our partner church history provided a challenge.

In the Fall of 2007, John Dale presented an excellent Saturday evening program about Transylvania to the congregation. On Sunday afternoon he met with all prospective travelers. These meetings were instrumental in providing basic information and setting the stage for our travelers. Some interested people decided not to travel with us when they learned details of the village stay, size of group and possible rough walking conditions.

Everyone, including spouses and parents of travelers, were welcomed to attend the six trip workshops spread out over the winter and spring. These meetings provided basic information and an opportunity for the travelers to get to know each other. Several people attended the meetings in hopes of going on future trips.

All pre-trip meetings started with a chalice lighting and ended with a closing reading. This contributed to the atmosphere of a pilgrimage. We used an electric tea candle and a red paper cutout of a Hungarian embroidery design as our "travel chalice". We took these on the trip and used them during several group opportunities for reflection or worship. Although our interim minister and a recent seminary graduate, who spoke Hungarian, traveled with us, these pre-trip meetings were lay led. The ministers each agreed to do a brief service during our trip. We managed to have a few additional gatherings for reflection during our trip and used some of these readings at that time also.

The following are examples of some of the chalice lightings or closing readings:

Edict of Torda

Covenant with our partner church

Quotes from Frances David

Spirit of Life in English and Hungarian

Quotes from UUPCC International Partnership Handbook

Hungarian Home Blessing

Six Pre-Trip Meetings

1) Orientation

Photos were taken of all travelers to send to our village
Viewed UUPCC Film – *Partners in Faith*
Discussion question: What do you expect from your travel?
Reviewed itinerary, maps and travel questions
Handouts provided related to Transylvanian Unitarian history
Relevant books available: *Prisoner of Liberté* by Judit Gellérd; *UUPCC International Partnership Handbook*; *The Alabaster Village* etc.

2) Basic Hungarian

Our Hungarian translator (not a church member) agreed to meet with us as we learned a few words and basic sounds. Handouts with greetings; common phrases; and typical names were provided. This was so popular that some members of the group requested two additional “classes”.

3) History of Hungary and Romania

This meeting was led by high school history teacher who had previously traveled to Romania. He created an excellent power point presentation.

4) Relationship with our partner church

Current and previous Partner Church Committee chairs described the history of our partnership; gifts exchanged; pulpits shared; scholarship programs; attempted projects and communication challenges. Handout was a timeline of partnership.

5) Tales from Previous trips

Past travelers shared personal highlights and stories from home stays. This included gift suggestions, communication etc. Handout was a list of families in our partner church and a map of the village.

6) A taste of Pálinka & final questions (one month before trip)

This meeting covered all remaining questions; packing and travel suggestions. Letter from partner church minister describing possible village activities was read.

Sunday service send-off

This recognition by the congregation contributed to the significance of the trip.

Our report (Fall 2008)

Travelers contributed photos to create a video program for the congregation. Each traveler was asked to share a significant event from their trip.

Barbara Weber 11/10/08