

CATHY CORDES CORNISH AWARD ACCEPTANCE REMARKS
UUPCC Annual Meeting
June 23, 2017, General Assembly, New Orleans, LA

Thank you for those kind words and thank you for this award. It is especially meaningful for me to receive it here - in New Orleans - my childhood home and to welcome my sister Teresa here today. I also want to recognize my many friends who are here from my current home, Bedford MA. And also, to recognize my good friend, Deputy Bishop Dávid Gyerö, from my heart's home Transylvania.

Next to raising my children, this has been the most meaningful work of my life. And I have done none of it alone. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some of the people who have walked this walk with me - starting of course with Ron Cordes, who has taken every step with me for almost 50 years. I truly could NOT have done any of it without you. Ron.

And John Gibbons who opened the door to international partnership for his congregation in Bedford and encouraged me to walk in. It changed my life in so many ways!

There are many others - many of whom have also received this award - that have shaped my journey: Judit "Zizi" Gellérd, who WOKE us all up. Leon Hopper, who shared his vision of international partnership and was a mentor and a friend. I miss him every day. Larry Coburn who showed me the love he had for Transylvania. David Keyes, whose Minn's lectures injected the goal of mutuality into partnership. Barbara Beach - guide, mentor and dear friend who shared the skills and business sense that helped develop UUPCC into an organization with a strong foundation. and Dick Van Duizend who shared his big heart, steady hand, and legal expertise. Richard Ford, who gave us the tools to engage in a respectful and authentic way with communities. And to the amazing staff of volunteers and employees over the years - Nancy Daugherty, Libby Hanna, Margot Fleischman, Elizabeth Hacala, and Catherine Van Praagh made work a joy every day!

And also to all of you - everyone in this room who do the day-to-day work of international partnership. Without you there would have been no meaning to or reason for UUPCC.

The most radical thing we can do is introduce people to one another. One of my favorite stories about our international connections comes from Marlin Lavenhar, the minister of All Soul's UU in Tulsa. Before he went to divinity school, Marlin taught English in Japan. After his job there was done, Marlin decided to go the long way home. So, he got a bike and biked across Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Europe before flying home to Boston. And he did this with very little money and not a lot of "stuff." And Marlin says everywhere he went he was welcomed with **amazing hospitality**. People welcomed him into their yards to sleep, into their homes for a cup of tea or something to eat. They let him wash up in the water from their well. And invariably, when it came time to leave, there would be the good-byes – and this admonition: "Now you watch out when you go to - and here they would name the next country or even the next village - "the people there," they would say, "are not as nice as we are."

But, of course, they were.

The story is amazing from so many angles - I, too, have been the recipient of **amazing hospitality** from strangers in so many places - as you probably have experienced too. And I too have been warned about the people in the next country. And recently, I am beginning to hear it about the people in the next state - as the culture of fear spreads in this country.

I hope that we can take some of our experiences with international partnership and apply them here at home. I hope that we can start a new effort right here to "**introduce people to one another.**" Because WE KNOW that when you get to know the other it is so much harder to demonize them.

I hope that we too can practice **amazing hospitality** right here in our homes and churches and towns - the kind we have felt in the humblest of homes in the Khasi Hills, in Kenya, in the Philippines, in Transylvania and wherever we have been. I hope that sharing our hospitality means that we will open our churches to the **sanctuary movement** - that we will take in those who are threatened with deportation. First Parish in Bedford, MA has voted to become a sanctuary church. We have renovated to prepare a living space in our building, and work with a dedicated coalition of groups in the great Boston area working with immigrants. We are ready to support, serve, and provide shelter to someone in need when necessary to prevent their deportation.

I hope that some of the lessons that Marlin learned on his ride across continents are the same lessons that we have learned through international engagement and partnership: the need to reach out to others and introduce ourselves, the power of hospitality to heal and serve, and the mutuality of partnership. I hope that we have arrived at a point where we understand these words from aboriginal activist groups in Australia:

*"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."*

In the beginning, many Americans thought the partnership movement was about us saving them. And now, it might be, that involvement in the partnership movement is about how we save ourselves.