



Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

Dear UUPCC Members and Supporters,

This is an update on last fall's position statement by the Hungarian Unitarian Church (HUC) Synod on marriage and the family. As many of you know, I joined several other US and global faith leaders in sending a collegial letter to the Synod members before the vote and then a Statement of Concern shortly after the vote. (You can find a copy of the Statement of Concern and a link to the collegial letter here:

http://www.uupcc.org/sites/uupcc.org/files/statement_to_global_uu_community-10-27_on_website.pdf).

We received a response to our collegial letter and Statement of Concern from the HUC's Consistory at the end of March. That response provided background on the HUC's statement as well as an official English translation of it. The Consistory asserted that our collegial letter and Statement of Concern were attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of the HUC. They also asserted that we treated rumors about external political pressure as facts. They went on to express an openness to addressing controversial issues and differences of opinion and expressed the desire that our understanding of the social and political environment in Transylvania and Hungary come from discussion with Unitarians there rather than the news media.

President Rev. Susan Frederick Gray, International Office Director Rev. Eric Cherry and Ambassador Rev. Harold Babcock from the Unitarian Universalist Association, Executive Director Rev. Sara Ascher from the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, and I joined in sending a brief reply to the Consistory. We thanked the Consistory for their reply and the translation of the Synod's statement. We reiterated that it was not our intention to tell the Synod of the HUC what to do but instead to share our concern about their statement. And we restated our understanding that there will be significant differences among the members of our global U/U faith. We joined the Consistory in being open to addressing controversial issues and differences of opinion, including this particular issue.

I continue to see this as an opportunity for deeper engagement in partnership. My fervent hope is that every single US and Canadian partner congregation will approach this disagreement seriously and engage with it in the context of mutual partnership. I want to see a deep, ongoing and honest conversation happen between Canadian/US and Transylvanian/Hungarian partnerships over marriage equality and LGBTQ inclusion. While I am disappointed that the Consistory experienced our communications as interference in internal HUC affairs, I am glad about their openness to addressing controversial issues and differences of opinion.

For me, mutual partnership can be an amazingly impactful vehicle for reflection and growth—on both ends of partnership. For example, I believe that engagement with our Hungarian Unitarian kinfolk who continue to identify as Christian has opened many US and Canadian U/Us—certainly including me—to examine some of our anti-Christian baggage and biases. Mutual partnership opens minds and hearts, for us and for our partners. It ALWAYS needs to be a two-way street.



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So how might US and Canadian partners engage with partners about marriage equality and LGBTQ inclusion?

First: I encourage you to start with the recommendations we shared in last October's Statement of Concern:

- Reflect with humility on the U/U journey of welcoming and inclusion. What has this been like for U/U individuals, congregations, and national organizations? There was a time, not very long ago, when many North American U/Us - and U/U's in many parts of the world - would have made private and public statements opposing marriage equality. In what ways has this changed? What can we learn from this reflection?
- Reflect on other justice struggles within U/U congregations and national organizations. How often have we failed? How often have we stumbled? How often has our impact been drastically different from our intent? How often have our actions not lived up to our words? What have we learned from this?
- Reflect on strategy. What has influenced the hearts and minds of U/Us in justice struggles, including the struggle for marriage equality? Can strategies of engagement with Hungarian Unitarian churches and the HUC benefit from that reflection?

This sort of reflection can help us approach conversations with partners about this matter with humility, curiosity, openness and creativity.

Second: get informed about this issue which continues to evolve in Hungary and Transylvania. Pay attention to different news media outlets (approaching each with a healthy skepticism), and ask your partners about their perspectives.

And third: by all means, broach this subject with your partners. Include this subject in your communications—whether by email, video conference calls, or (best of all) face-to-face. Make it a topic in conversations between individuals and in larger group conversations. Stay open and curious, and understand that this is going to be a long conversation. It's also helpful to understand going into the conversation that the Synod's statement was approved by 83%. This means that your partners most likely supported the statement. If they did, have an ongoing, honest conversation with them. Don't look the other way. Remember that the HUC leadership has expressed an openness to discussing this issue. If your partners were against the Synod's statement, ask how you can support them in their witness.

Several partners have asked me an excellent and important question about how safe it is for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer to travel to Transylvania and/or Hungary.

I'm not aware of any instances where the physical safety of US or Canadian partners who identify as or were perceived to be LGBTQ was threatened. Sadly, I have no doubt there have been and will continue to be occasions of micro-aggressions, inter-cultural mistakes, and at times perhaps emotional danger—which while obviously not unheard of here in the US and Canada including U/U congregations, is clearly cause for concern. When I'm asked about safety, I say all this—and I say that ultimately the person considering a trip needs to make the decision that feels right to them. I respect all of these individual decisions.



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I recently asked an ally in Transylvania about physical and emotional safety of LGBTQ visitors from North America. This ally suggested talking with a partner church minister before a trip so the minister can help prepare their church members. The Transylvanian minister generalized that Unitarians there want to avoid offending visitors—especially kinfolk in faith. That is pretty much how I experience North American U/Us when we have Transylvania/Hungarian Unitarians visit us: we don't want to offend them. Of course, this doesn't mean we don't offend them. Communication with the local minister in advance can help our partners avoid saying or doing things that cause offense.

The UUPCC continues to monitor the safety concern, and we in seek feedback from those who travel to Transylvania and Hungary this summer and fall—particularly those who identify as LGBTQ. Please let us know about your experiences.

When I preached at First Parish in Weston, MA, on the anniversary of the Edict of Torda's proclamation, I used a passage from Galatians 5 in which Paul follows up "Love your neighbor as yourself" with "If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." Maybe Paul is acknowledging here that it's normal in community to disagree about things. But when we do, we need to make sure we don't consume one another or the relationship.

So about this issue: voice your disagreement strongly and persistently, but do so in a way which avoids consuming your partners or, in a variation, cutting off your relationship. I believe that we need one another now more than ever—for our and our partners' well-being, and for the well-being of our U/U faith.

As always, I welcome your questions, feedback, and concern.

In peace and partnership,

Roger

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