

# *Support for your congregation with your international UU Partnership!*

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## Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

PO Box 88 • Bedford, MA 01730-0088 • 781-275-1710 • Email: [office@uupcc.org](mailto:office@uupcc.org)

### INTRODUCING YOURSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER

Of course, face-to-face introductions are the best way, and we do encourage you to visit as often, and as many of you, as possible. UUPCC is always ready to help with the logistics of visits to and from your partners. Let us know when you are traveling.

But there is another way to do introductions that has been done in various congregations with success. It takes some planning and can be an effective way to get to know one another and put a human face on the partnership.

One partnered congregation, in Hopedale Massachusetts, celebrates their partnership each year with a special service and does “introductions” as part of the service. We encourage the ministers to do their own introductions both individually with each other, and to the other congregation.

#### An idea for Partnership Introductions

Rev. Tim House writes:

*“For Partnership Sunday this year, my wife Ann Gary came up with a good idea I’d like to share. The minister of our partner church and her husband had visited here in Hopedale last Fall, and the goal now was to find some “ritual” way of introducing our parishioners to their parishioners in Csekefalva.*

*Here’s what we did: We asked about eight individuals from our congregation to write a short biographical sketch of themselves in the first person tense, and to include what was important to them about our partnership. The group was chosen to represent as broad a cross section of our congregation as possible. We then sent these “personal statements” via email to our partner church minister in Csekefalva, Noémi Szeredai. She had some members of her congregation do the same thing, and she sent them to us.*

*On Partnership Sunday, the members of our congregation who had sent profiles to Csekefalva, stood up in church and delivered their own biography to our parishioners, then went to another person in our congregation who was pretending to be someone from Csekefalva. They greeted one another, and then that person read the biography of the person they represented. They then went to another person in church who, after a greeting, delivered their own profile, and so on until all of our congregants had shared a greeting with all of their congregants. In Csekefalva, they did a similar thing during their worship service. “Parallel introductions.”*

*This was a great success, and had some unexpected benefits. Besides providing an introduction to some of our partners in Transylvania – and bringing them to life for us – we*

*also learned some things about our fellow-parishioners that we might not have known before. Our 'Introductions Exercise' created a wonderful atmosphere of sharing and supported my belief that the Partner Church program will not only bring us together with friends from far off places, but it will also bring us closer to those with whom we share worship, fellowship and service projects right here at home in the Hopedale Unitarian Parish."*

Here are a couple of examples of the profiles:

*(Read by a woman in our congregation)*

I am Zsofia Rafai. I am 18 year old girl. I live in Csekefalva with my Parents. My older sister is in college in Kolozsvár. I learn in Szekelykeresztur in the Orban Balazs High School in 12th grade. In this year I have the finale exam I have a lot to learn and I have just a little spare time. When I have time I like to hang out with my friends and Sunday afternoon my program is the Youth meeting. I like to meet different people. I am very happy for this partnership this gives me good feeling. I was very happy for your Christmas wish and present and I am grateful for your scholarship sent in 2001.

*(She then went to Rachel and greeted her. Rachel read her own profile)*

I am Rachel Newman and I am a senior at Hopedale High School who is turning eighteen in two weeks. I will be going to Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York in the fall. My primary study will be in English Literature, with secondary study in Theater. I love singing, acting, and my life's ambition is to become a professor of English Literature. I'd love to one day see our sister church in Csekefalva.

*(Rachel went to a man in our congregation who read Elek's profile.)*

I am Elek. I was born in 1955 n Székelykeresztúr, the nearby town. My wife is from Csekefalva so we moved here. We have two children, a boy 21 in college, and my daughter 19 also in college. I am working in Székelykeresztúr at a reused material center. I moved from city to village but I am happy. I am proud about my Unitarian ancestors. My grandfather's brother was a Unitarian bishop in the 60s.

*(He went to Peg and greeted her. Peg read her own profile.)*

My name is Peg. I have 3 daughters and two sons. I have 10 grandchildren who bring a lot of joy to my life. I certainly wish that I had more time to spend with them. I enjoy the ocean, walks, museums, time with friends and family. I was born in New York City, raised in Maine and have lived most of my life in Massachusetts. I was married and am now divorced.



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### COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

The importance of contact in your partnership is obvious to everyone – in order to have a relationship there has to be contact. So each partnership needs to consider – and answer for themselves – the basic questions: How? Who? When? What?

#### The “How” of Communications

This is, of course, the first question to be answered. If language is a barrier, you will need a translator. Identify those in your partner church who can speak English. If you need help with translation, check your congregation to see if there are native speakers. Sometimes this is the most surprising part – someone in your congregation may have ties to the country of your partner and can help. If not, contact the UUPCC for support.

The bigger question is often the technology. Not everyone will have ready access to the internet. Is it available? Many partners in the past bought computers to help with this. Now smart phones and tablets might be a less and more efficient solution.

If they have the technology, how are they most comfortable using it? Facebook? Email? Skype or ZOOM? In remote areas, texting a cell phone maybe the best method and least costly. Using a Skype account to call a cell phone is very inexpensive for us in the US and is probably the most accessible means of communication in remote areas. The US or Canadian partner can help by paying for the cell phone or smart phone and any ongoing charges. In most countries, cell phones are not monthly contracts. Rather, you purchase “minutes” of connect time and when you run out, you purchase more minutes. Work with your partner to find the best way. UUPCC can help with specific suggestions, so call if you need help.

#### The “Who and When” of Communications

In the beginning of the partnership, it is best to make this a deliberate connection with a regular schedule – say once a month or so. Determine who the “official contact” will be. Have this be a responsibility of the Partner Church Committee and rotate the position to include new people in the partnership. Ask your partner to also designate a person who will be the primary contact person to receive messages and to reply to them. It might be the minister if he/she is the only one with email. But as long as the contact is sharing messages with the minister on a regular basis it could also be someone else who has a means of communication

The best case of course is to develop lots and lots of informal connections and communicating between the members of the two communities. Consider this a long-term goal for the community. This happens when there are visits and friendships are formed. People meet and then keep in touch with one another. This is great! Often though that is personal in nature and not necessarily shared with the whole church.

### Special “Who”

Minister-to-minister connections are a vital part of the partnership. These often develop as peer-to-peer or mentor – mentee relationships one of the ministers is new to ministry or has had little opportunity for theological education, as so often is the case in less developed countries. This relationship is special and should be encouraged. Helping your minister to understand that role and assuring them that they do not have to do the nitty-gritty communications work makes this easier to establish. Consider suggesting that they start by exchanging messages to each other’s congregation at holidays (whichever ones are important in each church). These can be published in the order of service or read from the pulpit or printed in the newsletter. It is a great way to include your partner in the life of your congregation.

### The “What” of Communications

They want to know about your life, your church life and activities and special events and holidays. You probably want to know the same things. Think about conversations you have with new friends in your life and model the same in your communications with your partners. While it may seem a little strange in the beginning, soon you will have lots to chat about. See the suggestion in the Start-up Notebook on Introductions.

If you do have a Skype or ZOOM connection, think about setting up a meeting between your partner church committee and a few people in your partner church. How about a youth-to-youth conversation? There are endless possibilities to explore.

Once you have some projects together – like introducing members of your congregations to each other – communications will feel more natural. And as friendships develop, hopefully though visits, more connections will be made.

Enjoy your new partners!



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### MONEY AND PARTNERSHIP

The role that money plays in any partnership is probably one of the most uncomfortable, and most important, topics partners face. Your partnership is more likely to be successful when you discuss the role of money openly. The first step is to have this conversation in your own partner church committee and with your own church so that you can be clear about your motives, your vision and how use money to be of service to each other instead of “helping” or “fixing.” This quote from Rachel Remen, author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom, Stories that Heal*, captures this concept well.

Service is not the same as helping. Helping is based on inequality, it's not a relationship between equals. When you help, you use your own strength to help someone with less strength. It's a one up, one down relationship, and people feel this inequality. When we help, we may inadvertently take away more than we give, diminishing the person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem... Serving is also different to fixing. We fix broken pipes; we don't fix people. When I set about fixing another person, it's because I see them as broken. Fixing is a form of judgment that separates us from one another; it creates a distance. So fundamentally, helping, fixing and serving are ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak; when you fix, you see life as broken; and when you serve, you see life as whole. When we serve in this way, we understand that this person's suffering is also my suffering, that their joy is also my joy... We may help or fix many things in our lives, but when we serve, we are always in the service of wholeness.

The UUPCC published a white paper titled *Fairness and Awareness Guidelines* in 2005. We are aware that this remains one of the hardest issues in most partnerships. In 2006, we introduced the Community Capacity Building (CCB) process as one method of identifying locally-controlled and locally-defined projects that partners could work on together. You can read the Guidelines and the CCB descriptions and case studies at [www.uupcc.org](http://www.uupcc.org) This paper will summarize the best of the advice we have gleaned from partnerships over the years.

### LEAD WITH RELATIONSHIP FIRST – SUPPORTED WITH A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND TRAVEL

Any partnership needs a strong foundation of trust first. This does not happen overnight and it does not happen just because you have become partners. It comes from being in contact – sometimes bumping into each other – and then recovering from those bumps. The period of discovery of the other is one of the most exciting and time-consuming aspects of the partnership. Take time to get to know who your partners are: spiritually, culturally, historically. Some of this can be done through research, but much of it requires knowing each other's stories – and that requires communication. If you can visit a new partner within the first year, it will open the doors of communicating more effectively. If you cannot, there are other things that your partner church committee can do to begin facilitating effective communication.

UUPCC advises all new partners to only spend money in the first two years to:

1. Improve communication access so that the partners can communicate easily.
2. Support travel in both directions.

Often our partners are economically challenged – especially because communications tools (phones, tablets, etc.) and connectivity can be costly in developing countries, relative to income. Access to the internet in 2013 tends to cost about \$30 - \$40 USD per month regardless of the country. A smart phone, tablet or computer is necessary to use Skype or ZOOM or any of the meeting software that allows video. All of these are priced about the same as they are in the US. If the US congregation decides to finance this for their partner, in the interest of service to their partner, it will have to determine who gets the internet connection? The tablet/computer/smart phone? And who decides? Ah, the first good conversation has begun. The partners need to decide the answers to these questions together. But if their partnered community does not have the experience of shared resources, or even a decision-making process it might not be an easy decision. So this process often becomes the first learning opportunity for both partners.

The other role money should play in the first two years is for travel. The model for many US and Canadian congregations is for individual church members to pay their own way on visits to partners. But if the only ones who can go to visit are those that have the personal resources to travel internationally, your church is limiting who can fully participate in this partnership. Do you want to include youth? Do you want to include retirees? Staff? Young families? Do you want to send one or two people at first to act as ambassadors of the church, make first face-to-face contact with your partner and bring back information about your partners? If so, do you want to limit who you consider as ambassadors by their ability to personally finance the trip? There are many logical reasons to raise community funds to at least partially subsidize the cost of such a trip to your partners. This is a great opportunity for any congregation to have a conversation about the talents and treasures that all of us bring to our church communities.

As for travel from there to here, in many instances it will not be possible without some subsidy. US/Canadian congregations are usually pretty generous in giving to bring one or several people from your partner congregation. Here too, issues might arise. Who decides who comes? Is it the minister who always comes? Can you afford to bring a congregation member or members? Again, the other partner should select, but if you have preferences for youth/older person/male/female/etc. let those preferences be known so that you are not disappointed when they select.

This is a hard decision. A short story will illustrate: Early in Partnership, US Church X told their partner they wanted to bring the minister, his wife (not their children) and three people from the partner congregation. Church X requested that one of the 3 be a young person. The partnership was young and each wanted to please the other. Church X suggested their partner choose. How would your church resolve this? Now imagine that your country has just come out of 40 years of Communism. Decision making as a community was not a skill anyone had. They all said to the minister “You decide.” And so he asked, “Who is willing to go?” He sorted them by men, women and youth age 18 – 30. There were not so many willing to come, actually. This was quite a daring thing to do, especially if you

only speak Hungarian. And then he put the names in three hats and pulled one name from each hat. Church X did not know until many years later how those people were selected.

## BUILDING CAPACITY

Once the relationship is established everyone will begin to get ideas about how to be of service to one another. Sharing traditions and customs in your congregation helps everyone feel connected. Exploring how the Unitarian Universalist faith that is practiced in the partner community enriches the faith of each community.

If you are ready to think about projects, let your partner lead. Another story: In the early 1990's, many US UUs visited Transylvania farming villages in the early summer. They were surprised to see almost all the field work being done by hand. They decided what their partner needed was a tractor. About 10 different US and Canadian partners bought tractors. The Transylvanian communities were then faced with deciding: Who owns the tractor? Who decides how and when it is used? After having collective farming forced on them under Communism, few if any villages were ready to try collective property ownership again. Also, because the land had been divided again and again over the generations they had been handed down, many of the plots were small and narrow. Tractors were not really very useful.

This is what we call the USAID syndrome: *"WE have the solution whether or not YOU have the problem."*

A different perspective forms the basis of the Community Capacity Building process. The CCB process is based on recognizing that the local community knows best what its strengths and needs are. What they might need help with is organizing their knowledge, building consensus about the priority of their needs, designing an action plan, and identifying the resources they need to implement that plan. The CCB workshop helps develop and teach these skills allowing the local community to own the priority, the plan and the solution. Partners play a large role as funding source for the training, witness to the process, supporter and advocate and, in some cases, partners fund all or part of finances for the project. You can read actual case studies of CCB workshops in communities around the world on our website at [www.uupcc.org/partnerships/ccb](http://www.uupcc.org/partnerships/ccb) UUPCC is pleased to arrange a presentation at your church to explore the CCB process and tools and talk with you about how this can work for your partnership.

## SIMPLE GIFTS

Rev. David Keyes quotes some "unknown prophet" in *Most Like an Arch*, "We cannot embrace if are arms are full of gifts." If it is your first visit to your partner we know you will want to take gifts. The best advice is to keep it simple. Bring a gift that you can present during a church service – a flaming chalice, a banner that includes your church and theirs, cards from your congregation members who did not come – simply "Hello, we are glad that we are friends." Something from your RE classes – a book, a poster they sign, cards etc. Don't forget a photo directory if your church has one. Bring a photo book of the city where you live. Bring a few bags of chocolate kisses – enough for everyone in the congregation. Bring a simple camera for the church so they can send you photos.

There will be time in future years for other gifts so don't try to do everything at once. The basic guidance is make them personal, meaningful and something that everyone can share. UUPCC discourages expensive, individual-to-individual gifts. If you are staying in people's homes it is right to bring a hostess gift, but being overly generous creates pressure on other travelers to compete and creates jealousies among the partner congregants. It also creates pressure on host families to reciprocate.

Take some time before you travel to talk with the travelers on your trip about gift-giving and giving gifts of money to individuals. Discuss whether or not to do a communal gift to the Partner instead of, or in addition to individual gifts.

Discuss how to respond if an individual asks one of the travelers for money – for college, or living expenses or medical expenses, for example. When the economic situation is so unequal, and the emotions of being partners is running high, it is very easy to promise something that will cause difficulties in future years. In the flush of excitement of face-to-face visits, it is sometimes difficult to remember that you are building a communal relationship, for the long term, which means that you must go slow. Being prepared for this “ask,” will mean that you are better prepared to answer.

## WORKING TOGETHER

If you and your partner decide to do some kind of project together, hopefully after a CCB workshop, spend some time at the beginning to get as much information as possible. It is important to understand the total cost of a project in money, time and effort.

You will also need to understand the sources of support – financial and otherwise: from your partners themselves, local, national, and regional government, NGO's, other churches and organizations in the community. Many of us are not familiar with funding sources and grant writing and this is a good learning opportunity for all.

When the UU Fellowship of Fox Valley, Appleton WI decided to help the Deva Unitarians in Transylvania build a new building they explore every option. There were no funding sources available at the time in Romania so Fox Valley looked around. They found financial support from a non-Unitarian church in their town that contributed a sizable portion of the money needed to complete the building.

The UU Congregation of Fairfax and their partner in Szentgerice decided to build a medical clinic. Together they partnered with the Reform Church in Szentgerice and their partner from The Netherlands. The local congregations supplied much of the labor while the partners paid for most of the materials. The Romanian government agreed to pay the doctor's salary. The clinic has been operating and self-sustaining for nearly 15 years.

The UU Church in Nagbinlod held a CCB workshop and invited everyone in the village to participate. The community prioritized bringing in a new source of water as their top priority. The local government supplied the tank and the pump, US Partners bought the pipe, and

community members provided the labor. That community has gone on – working together – to build a school, manage the water distribution system and attract agricultural demonstration projects that have benefited the entire community.

Not every project has such a great outcome. There are many things to consider. What will happen after the water system, clinic, new church building, school is built? How will operational costs be covered? How will it be maintained? Helping partners talk through these issues is a great way to build capacity in the local community. Partners need to be thoughtful about paying on-going operational costs. Paying on-going operational cost creates an inherently unequal dependency relationship with your partner AND obligates your congregation to raise funds year after year after year.

## REALISTIC REPORTING EXPECTATIONS

Discuss your expectations regarding financial reporting in your own partner church committee first. What information do you want them to report:

- ...if you give a gift to the church and tell them they can determine how to spend the money?
- ...if you are financing a water project or a construction project?
- ...if you are supporting school expenses for students?

Are your expectations realistic? Managing a budget and fiscal reporting is routine for most of us in the US and Canada. It is NOT for many of our partners. Keep what information you ask for to the minimum needed and keep it simple. We often hear from people who complain that they have not heard how a gift or donation was spent. Many times it turns out that they never asked for a report or have asked for more than their partners are able to provide.

Be **very clear and specific** about what your expectations are. AND, then determine if your Partners have the skills needed to report in a way that you expect. If not, provide them with simple forms and sample reports. This is an opportunity to be of service by having someone in your church with knowledge of simple accounting to develop the forms and teach the basic concepts of a spreadsheet, a budget, and income/expense reporting. A simple Revenue and Expense statement is probably sufficient for most projects and yet, your Partners might be stymied by the concept.

Reporting and accountability can be very sticky issues. Considered thoughtfully and communicated well it becomes one more way to be of service and strengthen the Partnership.



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### THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Putting Together a Partner Church Committee –or– Re-energizing One That Exists

“You want me to join another committee?” Everyone has busy lives but they take time for the things that are meaningful and fulfilling to them. They need to see a reason to join and need to feel they can be helpful. Here are some ideas:

1. Ask someone artsy to help maintain the display/bulletin board about your partnership and/or to write articles for the newsletter. The material can come from old photos/new photos, letters including emails, gifts over the years etc. The right person might have a good time going through the history of your partnership and creating a timeline of visits and events etc. that could then be displayed or published.
2. Ask someone who works with the senior teens in your church if they are interested in creating new connections with the youth in your partner church. UUPCC is busy at work creating new resources for youth connections. We will have some materials out soon for on-line discussion groups with partner church youth. Maybe your group would like to pilot test the program? Has there ever been a youth trip from your congregation to your partner? Is there someone who would like to explore this idea and take some teens over to meet teens there?

Here is a link to a resource for planning a youth trip.

<http://www.uupcc.org/pilgrimages/planning-pilgrimage> Then CLICK on YOUTH TRIPS and download the GUIDE

3. Ask the minister to write to your minister and exchange greetings for Christmas, Easter etc. I know of several ministers who exchange prayers to be read during the service. Then ask your minister to read those in church.
4. Do you do an annual event? If so, invite some new folks to help. It does not have to be an “all church” fundraising event. Just a simple soup and bread lunch after church on a Sunday helps spread the word.
5. Ask someone who is computer knowledgeable to create a powerpoint presentation of your partner church history to show at the church lunch.
6. Find the folks who “like to travel” and organize another trip. Or join together with churches in your area and do a joint pilgrimage. Trips are the best connectors and UUPCC can help custom design one that will include all the Unitarian historic sites. It can be eye opening for many UUs.

Our website has lots of ideas as well. Check out these links.

<http://www.uupcc.org/healthy-suggestions>

<http://www.uupcc.org/partnerships/resources-partners> Then Click on WELCOME TO PARTNERSHIP Start-up Notebook



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### MUTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS THROUGH COVENANT

The word “*covenant*” translates in Hungarian as *szövetség* (su – vet – sheg). If there seems to be confusion with your partner about the word covenant—use some of the synonyms: undertake, contract, guarantee, pledge, promise, agree, engage, warrant, commit oneself, bind oneself. Talk about what you mean by covenant to be sure your partner understands.

The idea is that partnerships need to agree how to be partners. And the agreement needs to be mutual – that is, both parties work together to come to agreement on what partnership means to them. Many of our partnerships think there is agreement, but few have really worked together to check assumptions. And this can lead to misunderstandings and can even damage relationships.

Deliberate conversations are an important piece of work for partners. Here is a simple exercise that can have profound results:

Divide the group up so that you have groups of 4-5 people sitting close enough to talk to each other. If you are doing this with your partner, you will need a translator at each table.

- Step 1. (5 minutes) Give each person a 3 x 5 inch card. On one side, ask them to write “3 things we wanted to promise our partner,” — without talking to anyone else at the table. On the other side, each person writes “3 things we wanted our partner to promise us.” Again, this happens without discussion.
- Step 2. (15 minutes ) Now ask the small groups of 4–5 people to share what each person at the table has written. Decide together how to combine the statements into one common list.
- Step 3. (15 minutes) Combine 2 groups together and repeated the combining statements process. The 2 groups will now have 1 list. If there is time and depending on how many people are present, repeat this process.
- Step 4. At the end, share the common lists in a full group. There will be many common elements. Solicite volunteers – the wordsmiths of the group – to combined lists and turned it into a more formal statement. The volunteers can go off somewhere to complete this work and later in the day or even a few days later can return the formal covenant to the full group / congregation / partnership so that agreement can be reached on a formal covenant.

The first 3 steps can be completed in less than two hours. The process of the conversation focuses the work on common beliefs and values and helps clarify ideas about partnership. Much of value of this exercise is in the conversation, but it is good to have a document – even if it is a rough draft – that can be referred to in the future.

This process is helpful even if only one of the partners completes the process because it can provide a “vision” of partnership that can help guide your actions and communications. It can be shared with your partners so that they too can respond with their vision of partnership.