

Support for your congregation with your international UU Partnership!

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Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

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THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP – INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

At a recent meeting of the UUPCC Board of Directors, board members were asked to articulate the benefits of international UU partnership, and to share with you, our newest institutional members, some of the experiences they have had that illustrate these benefits. Here are some of their stories:

Partnership widens our perspective in terms of connections with real people in other places around the world.

I asked a young woman in a self-help group in a Manila shanty-town why she became a UU. She replied: "I became a UU because it teaches us we can improve our lives and those of our family in this lifetime. We don't have to wait for the next one." – Richard Van Duizend

You learn that the UU faith provides comfort and strength to poor, often illiterate farmers and everyday workers in all corners of the globe, not just well-off, well-educated North Americans. – Richard Van Duizend

Partnership connects us with Unitarian history that broadens our perspective about our faith and deepens our understanding of our faith and power.

In partnering with the Unitarian church in Déva, Transylvania, my congregation discovered not only the history of our Unitarian faith, but also the history of our own congregation. One of the nine people who came to the first meeting of my congregation in 1955 was Christine Wise. This is the same Christine who wrote "Alabaster Village" describing her life in Transylvania with the Rev. Balázs Ferenc. Some of us knew vaguely there was some Transylvanian connection with Christine, but we had no idea about the specifics or about how significant a figure Balázs was in Transylvania. Traveling to Transylvania, we learned about our own congregation's past. What an eye-opener! – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Partnership connects us with people of other socio-economic living conditions.

Too many American Unitarian Universalists believe that our faith really only appeals to a special few: highly educated, middle and upper class folks. There's a word for this viewpoint: elitism. Visiting our partners in the Philippines blew this elitist view out of the water. Most of our partners in the Philippines struggle financially and have limited access to education. Yet they, like us, have embraced this Unitarian Universalist faith. Maybe we've sold our faith short here. Maybe, our pilgrimages have taught us, our faith can speak to all sorts of people, not just this little North American demographic. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

We are introduced to radical hospitality.

We arrived at our Philippines partner church hours late. Yet there were a hundred people waiting for us to arrive. The instant we stepped out of the van, we knew they had welcomed us into their lives and their hearts. I have never encountered such radical, unconditional hospitality. It didn't matter that there was a language barrier. It didn't matter that living in urban North America is so vastly different from living in rural

Philippines. They conveyed to us instantly that we were connected, that we were brothers and sisters in faith. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

When you are served one of a family's three chickens, you begin to understand the true meaning of hospitality and generosity. – Richard Van Duizend

The first objective for students listed on a sign at the Puriang Unitarian School in the Khasi Hills is "Cultivating the fragile art of hospitality." – Richard Van Duizend

Being of service to each other teaches us how to work with others – even if there is a language barrier.

We arrived in Déva, Transylvania a few days before the Unitarian church there dedicated its new building. There was a lot to be done: embroideries to be sewn, windows to be washed, bathrooms to be scrubbed, floors to be swept. Partners for nine years, there wasn't a moment of hesitation on their part or ours. We dove into the work and worked side-by-side. I remember climbing up on a ladder to wash high windows. On the other side, an older woman had climbed up a ladder, too. We each pointed to the dirty spots that must be on the other side of the window, and together we cleaned those windows. It didn't matter that we couldn't speak the same language. We got those windows clean. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Partnership confronts us with our privilege.

When I arrived for the gathering of Unitarian Universalist ministers in the Philippines at the headquarters in Dumaguete, the ministers were sitting at a large table full of eyeglasses. They were busily working on the pile of glasses. "How wonderful," I thought. "They're putting together a set of glasses to give to villagers who can't afford glasses." Only slowly did it sink in that they weren't putting the glasses together for others. They were trying them on. The glasses were for them. Maybe, I realized, a lot of my assumptions about the Philippines and our partners there were grounded in my uncritical, uninformed sense of privilege. It might be time, I realized, to open my eyes a little wider – not just on our partners in the Philippines, but on myself. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Partnership gives us a sense of joy, experience of love and fun, and gets us outside of ourselves.

When we arrived at our partner church in the Philippines, there was an elaborate welcome and a talent show. I don't think I've ever been part of a more joyous, fun and even riotous church activity than that talent show. One of the high points was a Philippines version of the "Chicken Dance" which they insisted we join in. I don't know if I've ever laughed so hard. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Feeling connected...

Walking tentatively down a steep, muddy road in the Khasi Hills, there were suddenly rough hands in my hands to guide and steady me whenever my balance threatened to give way. When I remarked on this comforting support, I was told: "This is the meaning of partnership. When one partner is in danger of falling, another reaches out a helping hand." – Richard Van Duizend

Partnership helps with “size transitions” – from dependent...to independent...and the need to move into interdependence. This can help with that. Keep coming back to the table.

My congregation had just gone through the wrenching transition from a small to a mid-sized congregation. We had just built a new building. Both the size transition and the building project caused us to focus inward. Happily in our new space and adjusting to our new size, it was time to look outward. As the minister, I thought that a terrific way to do this was to become a partner church. I preached a sermon saying this and invited anyone interested in this to join an exploratory committee. Enough people jumped on board that we were able to move forward. That was fifteen years ago. Not only did it expand our view outward, it helped us grow into being a mid-sized and now large congregation. – Rev. Roger Bertschhausen

Partnership gives us exposure to a teaching moment about environmental challenges.

Sun Gazing – You can always look directly at the sun in India. The thick air protects my eyes from the sun’s dangerous rays just as it coats my lungs with its chemical haze. Brick factories belch. Smoke pours from burning fields. Mysterious smokestacks and flares vent unknown hazards. The mill converts bamboo into paper and darkens the sky in exchange. - Eileen Higgins

The Coal Cost – Coal is blackening the heart of what used to be the green hills of Meghalaya. Translated, this place is the abode of the clouds, where rain streamed down green pine-covered hillsides into life-giving springs and rivers. Coal trucks now choke these roads, choke the air, choke the lives of those who work there. They give up 15 years of their life expectancy to earn 150 rupees a day. They trade off a home for housing to dig and dig. Trapped digging.

Coal has been a business here only for thirty years. Such a short while, but the rivers are already poisoned, acid mine drainage killing off all living things. The acidity of the water and the soil has changed so much that rice cannot grow near Cherapunjee. Betsy tells me that it’s simple to prevent – run the water through a limestone bed. There is limestone everywhere here. If they can do it in West Virginia, why not here. Sadly, individual greed trumps rice and rivers in a place without regulations. – Eileen Higgins

Understanding of a broader definition of family ...

When our Philippines partners – female and male, young and old – sang "Welcome to Our Family" with tears in their eyes, we knew they meant what they were singing. With tears in our eyes, we joyously joined their family. – Rev. Roger Bertschhausen

Partnership challenges us theologically.

Our Transylvanian partner minister was driving us in the mountains. We were talking about theology. Suddenly he slammed on the brakes and said, "So you're not all Christians, are you?" He had studied in the United States for a year, but he hadn't fully realized this fact about American Unitarian Universalists until that moment. We answered affirmatively. Then he said, "Well, that's okay," and drove the car forward. While we didn't have a single moment where we realized the depth of Christian identity for our Transylvanian partners, it has been an important learning. And it's helped us understand not only the

Christian roots of our faith, but also has helped the non-Christians among us welcome and engage with the Christian Unitarian Universalists in our own congregation. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Learning how to be generous (not charitable) – mutual generosity through partnership.

Partnership is not about throwing dollars at our partners. That's not partnership; that's imperialism. Partnership is about mutual engagement, mutual growth, mutual generosity. It's about working side by side. We helped our partners in Déva, Transylvania buy a church of their own. But that dream would not have been realized without their financial support and the sweat and skill they poured into the project. It wouldn't have happened without the Unitarian headquarters' financial support. It wouldn't have happened without a gift of \$10,000 from a Presbyterian church in our area that saw an article about the project. Together, with our partners in the lead, the dream came true. – Rev. Roger Bertschausen

Community Capacity Building shows us that once people identify their needs and available resources, set their priorities, and develop a plan of action, little more outside help is needed for them to change and improve their lives. – Richard Van Duizend

Synergy within and between communities

Imagine this picture: Recent rains have made the road nearly impassable to Nagbinlod, a small village (barangay), up the road from the town of Santa Catalina in Negros Oriental, Philippines. The road is a long ribbon of mud and rocks threading up the hills through rice fields and mango orchards. Huts made mostly of bamboo and palm leaves dot the roadside. People watch us with suspicion: a woman pouring out a basin of water, a young man bouncing a baby on his knee as he sits on a bamboo porch. Who are these white strangers riding past in a van that is sure to lose its shock absorbers over the next pile of rocks?

We are ten foreigners along with our Filipino drivers and our guide, Rev. Rebecca Sienes, President of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines. We are Unitarian Universalists from around the world, and have just concluded a one-week conference as members of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists.

Around a curve we reach the point of no return. The van driver struggles to make it over the next soupy obstacle, but the van won't budge, its tires trapped in the mud. He backs up and eases forward, but it's no use. We will have to walk the rest of the way. We pour out of the van, trying to hop over the mud to reach the drier grass on the roadside.

We haven't gone very far when we find ourselves in front of a small cinderblock building with a sign below the peak of its roof. It reads: Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines, Nagbinlod Congregation. Beyond the church, there are more palm trees and a water buffalo grazing. As we walk to the entrance, small, beautiful, smiling people rush forward to greet us. They reach out their hands and they hug us, "Hello, my name is" Everyone is wearing a pink nametag with their name and the name of the group to which they belong within the church: the Board, the Farmers' Group, the Women's Group, the Men's Group, Youth, Children.

This is a community that doesn't have much, but food is served in abundance. Freshly roasted sweet potatoes, a rice and coconut soup served in mugs. We eat, as our hosts are introduced group by group. Then we introduce ourselves, we the strangers from the unknown with funny names and big, protruding noses. There's lots of laughter, smiles and nodding heads. Girls from the youth group perform a dance to a pop song, dancing the way adolescent girls dance all over the world. You can imagine them practicing together, debating the best steps and music, choosing their clothes and deciding to wear their Sunday sandals with tiny high heels. A choir of children sings for us, and then we're asked if a member of our group would like to share a message.

*"We are Unitarian Universalists
with minds that think,
hearts that love
and hands that are ready to serve."*

I teach them the hand motions, and Rebecca translates the words into Cebuano, and we repeat it all together again.

"We have minds to think and question, to learn and to wonder, to find our own truth," I tell the gathering in Nagbinlod. "We have hearts to love each other, just as you are loved by every person in this church. We have hands to serve because we are the hands, and feet and body of God. To make things happen, to do good in this world, we are the ones who must use our hands and do the work." That was it, my sermonette on the mount.

Smiles, hugs, goodbyes, and we are whisked back into the van. Riding down the hill, the people who had watched us with suspicion as we arrived now wave and smile. Children run along the roadside, trying to keep pace with us. Word has travelled quickly down the hill. We are no longer strangers to the barangay; we are family. – Rev. Diane Rollert

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Here are quotes about partnership that we have found inspiring and thought provoking over the years. We hope they do the same for you.

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together. — Lilla Watson 1985

Note: Watson has said of this quote that she was "not comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process" and prefers that it be credited to "Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s."

We're in this together, and if we united and we inter-culturally cooperated, then that might be the key to humanity's survival. —Jeremy Gilley, *TEDTalks* lecture

"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."

Rachel Remen

Being in a band is always a compromise. Provided that the balance is good, what you lose in compromise, you gain by collaboration. —Mike Rutherford

It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed. —Charles Darwin

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. —Helen Keller

If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself. —Henry Ford

Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than the one where they sprang up. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants. —Isaac Newton

Politeness is the poison of collaboration. —Edwin Land

I never did anything alone. Whatever was accomplished in this country was accomplished collectively. —Golda Meir

It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed. —Napoleon Hill

The secret is to gang up on the problem, rather than each other. —Thomas Stalkamp

Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean. —Ryunosuke Satoro

No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helped you. —Althea Gibson

The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team. —Phil Jackson

Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success. —Henry Ford

Good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and from trusting your intuition.
—Freeman Thomas

The lightning spark of thought generated in the solitary mind awakens its likeness in another mind. —Thomas Carlyle

Gettin' good players is easy. Gettin' 'em to play together is the hard part. —Casey Stengel

Thoughts about Travel

“When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.” — Clifton Fadiman

“Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends.” — Maya Angelou

“We travel, initially to lose ourselves, and we travel, next to find ourselves. We travel to open our hearts and eyes and learn more about the world than our newspapers will accommodate. We travel to bring what little we can, in our ignorance and our knowledge, to those parts of the globe whose riches are differently dispersed. And we travel, in essence, to become young fools again - to slow time down and get taken in, and fall in love once more. For if every true love affair can feel like a journey to a foreign country, where you can't quite speak the language, and you don't know where you are going, and you're pulled ever deeper into an inviting darkness, every trip to a foreign country can be a love affair, where you're left puzzling over who you are and whom you've fallen in love with. ... All good trips are, like love, about being carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder.” — Pico Iyer

“To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.” (Aldous Huxley)

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” — Marcel Proust

"Every trip we take deposits us at the same forking of the paths: it can be a shortcut to alienation -removed from our home and distanced from our immediate surroundings, we can afford to be contemptuous of both; or it can be a voyage into renewal, as, leaving ourselves and pasts at home and traveling light, we recover our innocence abroad. Abroad, we are all Titanias, so bedazzled by strangeness that we comically mistake asses for beauties; but away from home, we can also be Mirandas, so new to the world that our blind faith can become a kind of higher sight... If every journey makes us wiser about the world, it also returns us to a sort of childhood. In alien parts, we speak more simply, in our own or some other language, move more freely, unencumbered by the histories that we carry around at home, and look more excitedly, with eyes of wonder. And if every trip worth taking is both a tragedy and a comedy, rich with melodrama and farce, it is also, at its heart, a love story. The romance with the foreign must certainly be leavened with a spirit of keen and unillusioned realism; but it must also be observed with a measure of faith." —Pico Iyer



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SUGGESTED THOUGHTS TO PONDER, READINGS, AND HYMNS FOR WORSHIP

“The most radical thing we can do is introduce people to one another.”

Bumper Sticker, UU partner Church Council and First Parish UU in Bedford, Massachusetts

He drew a circle that shut me out -
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
But love and I had the will to win
We drew a circle and drew him in.

“Outwitted,” by Edwin Markham

Székely Áldás aka, Transylvania House Blessing

Hol hit - ott szeretet
Hol szeretet - ott béke
Hol béke - ott áldás
Hol áldás - ott Isten
Hol Isten - ott szűkseg nincsen.

Where there is faith there is love
Where there is love there is peace
Where there is peace there is blessing
Where there is blessing there is God
Where there is God there is no need.

*This has been put to music by Elizabeth Norton, Music Director First Parish UU in Concord MA
See the teal hymnal # 1043*

Reading

“We are the people,” writes Rev. David Bumbaugh, “whose religion is based on the practice of reason, freedom and tolerance. Whether we are talking about Unitarians in Transylvania, India, the Philippines, England, or New England; whether we are talking about Unitarians in the sixteenth century or the eighteenth century or at the end of the twentieth century, that is our distinguishing mark – ...the style of our religious life: a fierce and abiding commitment to reason and to freedom and to tolerance. And that religious style which is our hallmark, was created and crafted in Transylvania over four centuries ago, and is still cherished there by people who have suffered for their faith more than we can imagine. Someone needs to witness their struggle and care about its outcome. If not we, who have inherited their religious method, then who? And if not now, then when?”

Bumbaugh, David, “A Journey to Transylvania,” *Ending the Storm: UU Sermons on Transylvania*. Compiled by Dr. Judit Gellerd. The Center for Free Religion, Chico, CA. 1993

Reading

Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs UU minister of Unity Church in St Paul, MN writes: “It was the result of a series of debates convened in 1568 by John Sigismond, Prince of Transylvania, for the purpose of forging a lasting peace among warring Christian factions. Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans. Sigismond’s champion in the debates was Francis David, who along with the prince’s physician, George Biandratta and their mutual friend Faustus Socinus would found a new faith.” Sprung from traditional faith, the new faith challenged

the tradition that - those who were subordinate - would follow the religion of the ruler. "It would be a faith sprung from the tap root of the Christian tradition but it would be different. In place of fractious doctrinal disputes, would be a stern defense of the freedom to think for oneself. In place of fear and superstition, would be a gracious, open-hearted pledge to the use of reason in human affairs. In place of bloody wars, would be a generous toleration of the many ways to pray."

Eller-Isaacs, Robert L., "Roots Reaching Deep," *In Storm, Even Trees Lean on Each Other*. Compiled by Dr. Judit Gellerd. The Center for Free Religion, Chico, CA. 1996

Reading

"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."

Rachel Remen

HYMNS

GRAY HYMNAL

- 121 We'll Build A Land
- 123 Hymn – "Spirit of Life"
- 131 Our World Is One World
- 148 Let Freedom Span Both East and West
- 159** This is My Song
- 181** No Matter If You Live Now Far or Near
- 182** O, the Beauty in a Life
- 188 Come, Come, Whoever You Are
- 287 Faith of the Larger Liberty
- 318 Hymn "We Would Be One"
- 325 Love Makes a Bridge
- 347 Gather the Spirit
- 346 Come Sing a Song with me
- 352 Find a Stillness (Traditional Hungarian hymn)
- 402 From you I Receive To You I give

TEAL HYMNAL

- 1043 Székely Áldás (English and Hungarian)



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A Guide to Reflection by Rev. Ruth Gibson

THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PARTNER CHURCH COUNCIL VISION

The vision of the UU Partner Church Council is that partner relationships between North American congregations and churches around the globe will be forged and sustained wherever they are desired—and that these relationships will be of high quality, firmly based, mutually beneficial, responsibly sustained, and linked by a joint and mutual covenant. We envision a commitment to international engagement as a moral and spiritual principle that is integral to Unitarian Universalist congregational life.

Reflections on Partnership **A Journaling Guide for Pilgrims in Partnership**

Welcome to this Partner Church pilgrimage. Whether you are meeting with your congregation's partner church, or with a school or other organization related to the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church program, or joining this journey in order to meet your partners in faith from a different culture for reasons of your own, we expect that this experience will bring you joys, questions, new truth, new beauty, and inspiring opportunities to grow in faith and in understanding of the world.

Being in a new culture can also be a confusing experience—you may gain information that challenges old assumptions, have encounters that stir up unexpected emotions. Traveling as a partner rather than as a tourist invites you to be open to being changed. We recommend that you use or begin a journal. Creating space for you to reflect on your journey will enhance the experience.

If journaling is new to you, and you don't know where to begin, some of the open ended "sentence starters" may be useful. You might also consider choosing a moment, event or conversation from your day, and describe it with as much sensory detail as you can. Follow that with a paragraph on why this moment was meaningful to you, what questions it raises for you, what insights it offers you. If you find yourself having vivid dreams on your journey, you may want to record those—best done first thing in the morning! Sometimes people like to draw or sketch in their journals.

It is also helpful to have a place to record the names of people you've met (and contact information if you might correspond), to identify photos you've taken. If you are taking home any commitments, questions or information, it's a good idea to have that written down as well.

Whether or not you plan to bring a journal along with you—and especially if you already have a journaling practice, it is a good idea to bring along a pocket-sized notebook so that you will always have a handy place to record the thoughts, questions and information that comes to you. Relevant parts of this can be transcribed into your journal later.

There may be some opportunities built in to your pilgrimage itinerary for sharing reflections with fellow pilgrims during the trip. More likely, spontaneous opportunities for such sharing may arise. Our way in religion calls us to remember that no single person can see and understand the fullness of truth. Consider covenanting with one or two traveling companions to make some time every two or three days, to share your impressions and reflections. Towards the end of the journey such meetings can help you prepare to bring your stories home, and this will be especially important if you are to report to your congregation. You may also want to practice a daily “check in” with each other, to help each other manage the small stresses that are part of any change of scene.

This Partnership Journaling guide is a resource for your reflections. Whether you use it as a guide for written journaling, or for conversations with your fellow pilgrims—it is entirely yours.

Blessings on your journey!



Here are a few things to think about, or reflect on, before your journey or near the start of it.

My Purpose

Each of us has our own purpose for making this pilgrimage; in addition you may be meeting partners as a representative of your congregation, and have other purposes or goals for this trip in addition to your own. Your sense of purpose for this journey may be very clear—it may be fixed, or it may change or grow in the course of the experience.

- Why are you going on this journey? (how many ways can you answer this question?)
- What are you looking forward to, or expecting?
- What do you hope will happen on this journey or because of it?
- What concerns or worries do you have about it?
- Given your goals, hopes and concerns, what would be helpful for you to ask for, or to remember?

Sharing yourself

What do you want your partners to know about your family? Your work? You might think about bringing some photos to illustrate important parts of your life— a family gathering, your home and work life, a church event, the outside environment, in different seasons.

The Meaning of Partnership

What does it mean to have a partner—and to be one?

What’s the difference between being a partner and being a tourist?

It has been said, “It is hard to embrace someone when your arms are full of gifts.” How is partnership different from charity?

Cultural assumptions

When we enter as guests into another culture, it is helpful to be mindful of the assumptions we carry from our own. Much of what we consider “normal” or “right” is based on the culture in which we live. We are not always aware of the ways in which our cultural assumptions influence our judgments, or our feelings of comfort and discomfort.

As North American Unitarian Universalists, we expect to experience (and to value) considerable cultural, political, economic, religious diversity within our own small group, and may not want to over-generalize. However, there are some themes that are dominant in Western culture that may influence our perceptions of a different culture—or the assumptions others make about us. The Mennonite guide for cross-cultural learning suggests reflection on the following:

- *Progress is better than tradition. Therefore, change is always promising.*
- *The new (or young) is better than the old.*
- *The future holds promise. The past is of little value.*
- *Doing is better than being. Therefore staying “busy” or active is very important.*
- *Getting there fast is better than enjoying the journey.*
- *Order, organization and efficiency hold great importance in society.*
- *Individual freedom is more important than the common good. When there is a conflict between the two, it’s better to guard personal freedom.*

It may be helpful to notice whether these attitudes are apparent or predominant in the culture you visit, or whether your perceptions, judgments or responses to the people and situations you encounter are rooted in any of these assumptions.

Please also remember that many of the issues you feel strongly about as a North American Unitarian Universalist—the role of gender, racism, theological identity, family structure, for examples—may not be central issues in your partner culture—or if they are, there may be different histories and experiences and assumptions around them. If you are preoccupied with presenting your views on these matters, especially if you find yourself tempted to enlighten those of your hosts who seem to see things differently, it will be that much more difficult for you to meet your partners, come to know them, or understand their values.

Expectations and Impressions

(an exercise adapted from the Mennonite Central Committee’s handbook, “Connecting Peoples”.)

Look through the following list of adjectives and mark those that you think people in the country you will visit will expect you to be like. Add additional adjectives until the image is expressed adequately.

<i>formal</i>	<i>frank</i>	<i>independent</i>	<i>serious</i>
<i>dependent</i>	<i>shallow</i>	<i>relaxed</i>	<i>assertive</i>
<i>trusting</i>	<i>reserved</i>	<i>indifferent</i>	<i>humorous</i>
<i>calculating</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>powerful</i>	<i>cautious</i>
<i>competitive</i>	<i>impulsive</i>	<i>feminine</i>	<i>loud</i>
<i>talkative</i>	<i>cool</i>	<i>informal</i>	<i>aggressive</i>
<i>masculine</i>	<i>cooperative</i>	<i>independent</i>	<i>arrogant</i>
<i>closed</i>	<i>evasive</i>	<i>warm</i>	<i>rational</i>
<i>tense</i>	<i>suspicious</i>	<i>spontaneous</i>	<i>emotional</i>

Go through the list again. Using a different color ink or different mark, identify the adjectives you think fit members of your traveling group, or how you see them in comparison to other cultures.

During the Journey

Notes on these pages may be helpful during your journey. The reflection questions provided below might be used on a daily basis or occasionally, if they seem useful to you.

Understanding another Culture

Observation—Interpretation—Emotional response

Along this journey and at other times in your life, you may encounter different and contradictory statements of “truth.” In your search for truth and understanding, how do you know what to believe? How do you decide what is true? How do you live with the question, if you aren’t sure?

What we think about and remember about any experience will be based not only on our observations, but also on how we understand or interpret what we observe, and how we feel about what it is we think we understand. A cross-cultural experience will be richer if we distinguish between these three aspects of “knowing.”

- Understanding another culture is a difficult and complex undertaking, and should be approached with some humility. It is helpful to remember that different people observe the same situation or event in very different ways, may notice different details.
- Any observation of an event or situation may be interpreted or understood in multiple ways; what I think is “true” about something we experienced may be very different from what you or anyone else thinks is “true.”
- How people feel about what we observe is greatly shaped by our interpretation of the event. However, while people may feel differently about the same thing, no one else can tell you what you feel or ought to feel.
- New information may change your interpretation and therefore, your feelings about what you have observed.

It helps to pay attention to what you observe, to be careful to distinguish between observation and interpretation, and to be respectful of but not driven by, your feelings and others’.

Observation log.

Jot down responses to these questions. It might be helpful to share your responses with a reflection partner.

When we were _____ [*Event or situation*]

I observed...

I thought...

and that made me feel...

Evening reflection log:

Today I was surprised by...

Today I appreciate...

Today I learned....

Today I wondered...

SHARING YOUR PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCE

What information will be important for you to share with others when you return?

What memorable experiences or impressions will be important for you to share?

What will you now do to build your partnership? With whom will you do this, and when?

SERMON: REV. GARY SMITH

*The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities;
But to know someone here and there who thinks and feels with us,
and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit—
this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.*

— Goethe

I became Senior Minister of the First Parish in Concord, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1988. I was forty-one years old, I was well traveled within the continental United States, but I did not have, nor had I EVER had, a passport. I had lived in Maine most of my life and had, two or three times, put my toes over into Canada. Did the Concord Search Committee know? Was I the only one in the room without a passport? It was a dirty secret.

Here's what happened to change that. A member of my congregation at that time was the Representative from the Fifth Congressional District of Massachusetts, and he had been asked by then UUA President Bill Schulz to be a part of a delegation to go to Romania, to Transylvania, to put some pressure on President Ceaucescu and his treatment of the ethnic Hungarians within Romania, our fellow Unitarians.

This trip was scheduled for early January of 1990. You may remember that student uprisings began in eastern Europe in December of 1989, culminating in the capture, trial and execution of the Ceaucescu couple on Christmas Day. How did it happen that I was suddenly invited to join the delegation? How did an expedited passport end up in my hands? My first foreign trip! Not the Grand Tour, not London, or Paris, or Rome. Bucharest! And it was burning!

Machine gun armed soldiers guarding the Bucharest runway and terminal. Bullet holes in our hotel walls. Sidewalks outside were candlelit by memorials to fallen young people. Clandestine rides in U.S. Embassy vehicles to meet with dissidents. Be careful what you wish for.

And then a train ride north from Bucharest, overnight, to Kolojvar or Cluj. Second class economy, third tier of wooden bunks, hole in the train car floor for urination or worse. And then it is morning, and we have arrived, and we are now royalty.

This is when my life changed, and this is why I am here now to bear witness to the power of partnership. And I know you have your own stories. We were swept up, loaded into vans, and driven from village to village. Polenka. Chimney cakes. Kisses on cheeks. People standing in darkness outside their churches, waiting for our very late arrivals. Village after village, polenka shots and the faces, the children, the welcome.

We went to Skeleykerezstur, a small city, partner church to Concord, and I met there the minister, an old man who had suffered much. Years later, he would show me the torture marks on his leg. A Partner Church Committee was formed in Concord, the Hungarian American Committee of Boston helped with translation. Money moved their way to help. Four of us returned to Skeleykerezstur in 1993.

We stepped from the van into the church courtyard in 1993. Wait here, they gestured to us, and then down the street there comes a dozen high school students from the regional Unitarian high school. And there, in the front row, tight curly dark hair, is Zsuzsanna, she is fifteen, and are they singing John Denver's "Country Roads"? My life is going to change again. How can it be?

Was it three years later, a letter arrived from Transylvania, from a matchmaker, would we, my wife and I, consider taking a high school student from Skeleykerezstur into our home for a year, take her senior year at our Concord-Carlisle High School? It is Zsuzsanna, daughter of minister Jozsef, daughter of Anna, brother of Jozsef, Jr. Indeed we would, and in the summer of 1997, my college-aged daughter and I flew to Budapest, fifteen hours in the car to Zsuzsanna's village, to bring her back to America with us. This is when my life changed, and this is why I am here now to bear witness to the power of partnership.

She came in August and went home in late June the next year, and I wept buckets when she left. She had come into our home and into our hearts. Everything was new to her. I would drive her home from an event and she would point to one of the ridiculously large homes in Concord and ask me, "Gary, how many families live there?" And I would answer, "Oh Zsuzsanna, I am so sorry, only one."

She studied constantly. Here I am for the first time, telling a child in my house to stop studying and have fun! Still land line telephones. I wired a phone into her room. She would call my elderly mother in a nursing home in Maine, and she with a Hungarian accent, and my mother, with a thick Maine accent, would talk, two lonely people sometimes. Nana, she called her. Back in Romania, she would call my mother on Mother's Day, and my children would scream at that news!

Would you understand, on subsequent visits to her home, when I looked on the wall, and there is a picture of my mother, that my breath is taken away? Still later, there is a message from Zsuzsanna, she has gone to university in Budapest, she has met a man, a Unitarian from Transylvania, and they are getting married. Will we come?

And we did; and what memories, an eighteen hour wedding, from 1 p.m. one day, to seven in the morning the next. The day before her wedding, Zsuzsanna and her father drive the four hours to Bucharest to greet us at the airport. And then on her wedding day, we sit with Anna, the mother of the bride, during the ceremony; we are her other parents, she says. And we sit with her parents at the head table, and I dance with the bride, and do you understand why partnership has changed my life.

And not just Zsuzsanna and the Szombatfalvi family. Jozsef, I call him my brother. But not just the personal. What shall we make of the institutional? First Parish in Concord. The Unitarians of Szekeleykeresztur. It all began with trying to save them, money going one way. We began sponsoring students through the high school and into university, and we still do. It began with a heating system for their sanctuary, until we visited shortly after and found the heat only going to where the men sat. More money. Warm the women!

And our young people going in the summer on work trips. Gathering firewood for the poorest for Carpathian mountain winters. Fixing roof tiles. Preserving old books. Singing. Playing soccer in a high mountain meadow.. And a small subsidy to pay the minister, part of our own staff costs. And our choir going there, so many times, singing, singing together, learning Hungarian, tears streaming down those worn beautiful faces. A sea of thousands standing in silence as our choir sang the Transylvanian anthem to a worldwide gathering on a Transylvanian hillside on a warm August afternoon. I have memories.

Weave the institutional with the personal, because each young person, each choir member, each pilgrim, had home stays and reached across bread to meet, to sit close, to experience hospitality beyond any measure. You know the power of all this here in Mt. Vernon. The places are different but the web of humanity is the same.

I could go on and on, and some of you may think I have, but I have one last story. It is 2010. I am nearing retirement. Concord is in the final stages of a capital campaign. \$4.5 million, and we have \$365,000 to go, and those last dollars are not coming easy, and we are determined and we are discouraged. And it is September of my last year in that pulpit, and coming down the aisle during announcements is a young woman from Szekeleykeresztur, completing a summer, working at a farmstand in Concord.

And she comes up into the pulpit, and she has an envelope, and she has a big smile on her face, and she asks me to stand next to her, and she passes me the envelope. Open it, she says. Here is a gift from your partner church, to help with your capital campaign, and I open the envelope and inside is a card, and on it are numbers. We have raised \$10,000 for you, she said, and my eyes are filling with tears, and my knees are weak, and I have to sit down.

Do you understand why I am here today to testify to the power of partnership? We have come full cycle. Our partners are giving to us. The farmer/school teacher, has pledged his August paycheck of \$600. to help us. \$50. here. \$20 there. This is partnership. This is transformation. We are more than ourselves alone. My mother's picture was on the wall in a house half a world away. It is all one world. We are all in this together. People dance at weddings everywhere.

*Country roads, take me home
To the place I belong,
Take me home, country roads
Take me home, country roads*

Gary E. Smith
Belmont, MA 2015
Retired Minister, First Parish in Concord, MA

SERMON: REV. SCOTT PRINSTER

Living Our Lives in Widening Circles

UU Church of Toledo

April 3, 2011

READING from *The Places That Scare You* by Pema Chödrön

An analogy for *bodhichitta* is the rawness of a broken heart. Sometimes this broken heart gives birth to anxiety and panic, sometimes to anger, resentment and blame. But under the hardness of that armor there is the tenderness of genuine sadness. This is our link with all those who have ever loved. This genuine heart of sadness can teach us great compassion. It can humble us when we're arrogant and soften us when we're unkind. It awakens us when we prefer to sleep and pierces through our indifference. ... Even ordinary people like us with hang-ups and confusion have this mind of enlightenment.

A young woman wrote to me about finding herself in a small town in the Middle East surrounded by people jeering, yelling, and threatening to throw stones at her and her friends because they were Americans. Of course she was terrified, and what happened to her is interesting. Suddenly she identified with every person throughout history who had ever been scorned and hated. ... Something cracked wide open and she stood in the shoes of millions of oppressed people and saw with a new perspective. She even understood her shared humanity with those who hated her. This sense of deep connection, or belonging to the same family, is *bodhichitta*.

SERMON Rev. Scott Prinster

Living Our Lives in Widening Circles

Pema Chödrön's words in our reading this morning suggest that our true being may be found in that moment when the armor of our invulnerability and comfort is pierced, when we are touched in our tenderest heart with the knowledge of the deep connection that joins us all in spite of our apparent differences. Although I had studied sentiments like this during my seminary education, that we might have more in common than separating us, it was not until after I had spent two years working with the Unitarians in Transylvania that I understood how true and transformative this idea could be.

Because most of us experience Unitarian Universalism primarily in our local congregations, it's easy to forget how many thousands of other seekers are gathering today in religious communities very like this one. Many of us associate this movement with our immediately local experience of it, or perhaps think of the free and rational impulses in religion as uniquely western, especially suited to the Emersons and Thoreaus of New England culture.

What a surprise, then, to consider the many expressions of liberal religion that have developed in such diverse settings around the world. In particular, it would be easy to overlook completely the tumultuous 16th century when the Protestant Reformation swept through Europe, and surprising places such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania were too briefly islands of religious tolerance, more progressive than in England, for example, where dissenters were regularly assaulted or even executed. What a surprise to learn that the roots of our own liberal religion were flourishing in Eastern Europe long before they were even planted here in the United States. Throughout the turbulent history of this region, even through the later misery of its people under communism and totalitarianism, desperate poverty and bureaucratic absurdity, we see that there have also been congregations and individuals who have nurtured the spirit of liberal religion and the work of religious tolerance, suffering because of their efforts, but persevering nonetheless.

Thanks largely to the work of Irish novelist Bram Stoker, perhaps none of these places is as mysterious and evocative as Transylvania. We associate the name with fantastic images – of Dracula, of course, and sinister, shadowy castles, both romantic and eerie. Occupying a mountainous region about the size of West Virginia in what is now northwest Romania, the real Transylvania is both complex and challenging, and also an important key to the history and identity of our religious movement.

My real interest in worldwide religious partnerships really began in 1994 when a Transylvanian Unitarian minister, the Rev. Sándor Léta, and his wife Erika came to Berkeley, California to spend a year at Starr King School for the Ministry, where I was a student. Instead of the names and dates and places in our history books, Sándor and Erika shared with us the real story of how Unitarianism was able to emerge and survive in a world so different from our own, in the very Eastern bloc that Ronald Reagan once called “the Evil Empire.” And I had the same questions that many of you likely have:

what form can religious liberty take in a setting so different from American democratic society? What do Transylvanian Unitarians, who are unapologetically Christian, have to do with American Unitarian Universalists, many of whom have an uneasy relationship with Christianity? Is there any reason to see us as religious kin, and any reason to cultivate a connection with them? These are questions worth asking, if our link with the Transylvanian Unitarians is going to be anything more than sentimental wishful thinking.

When I arrived in Transylvania in 1996 to serve as the English teacher in the Unitarian seminary in the city of Kolozsvár, I had the good fortune of already being able to speak both Hungarian and a little Romanian, so I didn't feel a stranger there for long. I was able to follow the sermons and prayers in church, and soon even preached some of my own, as well as participating in the community life of the student body, so I was soon being treated like one of the family. I was able to be involved emotionally in people's everyday lives in a way that a typical visitor might not. The stories and experiences that I absorbed there helped me to appreciate their history in a new way and grasp how significant the Unitarian faith has had to be in their everyday lives. Much of that understanding has come as a result of having to acknowledge the harsh realities of life for the people living in Transylvania.

My first views of Romania as we crossed the border from Hungary were from the highway as it threaded through the city of Nagyvárad, or Oradea in Romanian. I was horrified to admit how much the city looked like every cartoon of Eastern Europe – gray, crumbling buildings lined the road, punctuated only with the garish red of Coca-Cola signs and the faded colors of laundry hanging from balconies. Although my later impressions were far more positive and I came to love the gorgeous countryside and the hospitable people, I cannot shake even 15 years later my shocked memories of that first glimpse of my new home. A brutal history under dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, and Romania's struggle to reconnect after decades of forced isolation from the rest of the world, had made demands upon its people that I could scarcely imagine. The inflation rate there had been appalling, so bad that prices had tripled in the first six months I was there. Interethnic and interreligious hostility, although improved since then, had found expression in conflict, discrimination, and simmering resentment. The industrial pollution was horrifyingly bad, so unhealthy that the life expectancy was as low as 50 in some mining cities. My female students, then just in their early 20s, were worrying about potential thyroid and reproductive problems from Chernobyl's fallout in their air and water, a sobering thought as we now wait to learn more about the damage to Japan's

nuclear reactors. And it wasn't all that long before that Romania's epidemic of HIV-infected orphans had burst upon the world's awareness.

The historical circumstances of Eastern Europe and of Transylvania in particular made it difficult not to see this region as a world completely alien, wholly unlike our own. As much as I bristle when I hear others caricature Transylvania as a picturesque land of quaint, simple villagers, I have to acknowledge that I also struggled with the conclusion that it was a place that had nothing to do with my own affluent life and my own smugly comfortable Unitarian Universalism. Over my two years in Transylvania and the many years that have followed, I have returned again and again to that land and to the question of how we -- whose lives are among the most privileged, the most comfortable and, until a decade ago, the most sheltered in the world -- understand life in this context. More to the point of our time together this morning, how do we make sense of a Unitarianism practiced by a people whose lives seem so different from ours?

I found that, only by listening to their stories, grieving with them the absurdity and hardship they have suffered, and celebrating together with them the wonderful persistence of the human spirit, was I able to comprehend the critical role that Unitarian faith had played in their survival. Through their worship and their stories I was able to understand how much our two churches truly have in common, and how much each of us gains from our connection with one another.

I think back to when I had been there a little less than a year, and the church was celebrating the spring holiday of Pentecost, one of the four Sundays when the Transylvanians serve communion, a dignified ritual of bread and wine which I soon came to love. On this particular morning, however, I was feeling more despair than joy; the 23-year-old son of the congregation president had committed suicide just that week, as had another young Unitarian woman in an unrelated suicide. As we put on our robes and prepared to enter the church, I felt that I was seeing my own overwhelm and dismay on the other ministers' faces. After deaths so recent and so central to the congregation, what clever words could I possibly offer that would convey the Pentecost message of the genuine presence of God in their lives? I felt like a disappointment and a fraud, utterly at a loss about what to say.

When it came time for the communion ritual, we six ministers stood and walked to the center of the sanctuary, where the great carved wooden table stood, the bread and wine

laid out. Singing the communion hymn, members rose and lined the aisles and central open space of the sanctuary. I took up one of the chalices, the 450-year-old chalices of the founder of Unitarianism Ferenc Dávid, and walked to the head of the line, where the congregation elders waited. Hands received the chalice from me, pair by pair, and raised the wine to their lips. Gnarled hands, arthritic hands, battered by decades of work and hardship still unimaginable to me, held the heavy chalice and reaffirmed their place in that community of faith. And as they received the wine from me, each of them looked into my eyes – I had been completely unprepared for this – looked into my eyes with a seriousness and power that moves me still to think of it. And each pair of eyes seemed to say, “Don’t worry – we’ve been here for 450 years, and we’re not giving up anytime soon. We have seen so much suffering, but we who have survived, live with dignity because of this community of faith.” Even the decades of violence upon the human spirit could not overcome the redeeming power of the Unitarian Church’s message, and the hope they found in being together, especially at the moments when despair threatened to overwhelm them.

It’s not surprising, considering the many experiences like this I have had in Transylvania, that the land and its people hold a special place in my heart. My relationship with the Unitarians there has shown me something critically important about my own faith tradition, that it becomes more authentic as it is expressed in ever larger circles of connection. The Partner Church Program of the Unitarian Universalist Association, which was catalyzed in 1990 by Transylvanian native Judit Gellérd to pair American Unitarian Universalist and Transylvanian Unitarian congregations, sums up its mission in a bumper sticker we sell that says, “The most radical thing we can do is to introduce people to one another.” These introductions have created life-long friendships between religious liberals on both sides of the ocean, and made Transylvania a pilgrimage destination for hundreds of Unitarian Universalists, who have gained, as I have, a radically enriched understanding of our movement and ourselves.

In the last decade, as Romania has developed economically to join the European Union, these partnerships between congregations have been challenged to move to a new level of maturity. I realize now that I was despondent over my lack of words that Pentecost day and astonished at the Transylvanians’ resilience because I had thought of our relationship as one of rescuer and rescued -- we Westerners often participated largely in terms of sharing our wealth, and were going to fix them by making them more like us. The genuinely meaningful pilgrimage destination of Transylvania has constantly run the risk

of becoming a spiritual entertainment destination, which we visit as consumers to participate in their exotically different life. In this role as victim and recipient of our western generosity, the Transylvanian Unitarians' religious depth and courage seemed to surprise people – how could their faith life be so sophisticated and authentic without the conspicuous affluence and individualism we enjoy in the United States?

As most Romanian citizens have enjoyed the shift to a more western standard of living, the historic city of Kolozsvár enjoyed the appearance of new goods and new opportunities, including a couple of shopping malls bigger and fancier than anything I've seen here in the United States. Although not everyone has benefited equally from this success, and their congregations still struggle to stay afloat financially, we have had to consider the Transylvanian Unitarians as something other than our poor eastern cousins, and our partnerships have become less based on this rescue model.

Aboriginal Australian activist Lilla Watson wrote, “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.” This is the sentiment that best encapsulates for me what is happening now in our partnerships, like yours with the congregation in Aranyosrákos, like hundreds of congregations worldwide in these partnerships – we are coming to see that our wholeness and our authenticity are in fact bound up inextricably with one another.

American Unitarian Universalism and Transylvanian Unitarianism still have a great deal to offer one another, even as our relationships are evolving. We have benefited so much from their long history and courage in the face of enormous adversity. They have looked to us for examples of how to modernize their movement as Romania struggles with the new opportunities and challenges of western capitalism. The worldwide movement that is cultivated at this threshold – the edge between East and West, the edge between tradition and freedom – is not a church of simple answers and cheap solutions. I believe that it is, more than ever, a meeting place where we can find a sense of belonging to a great and tenacious religious family, where we may reap the rewards of a real and honest faith. May we be grateful for this opportunity to grow in authentic relationship with a world that still has so much wonder to offer. May it be so.

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Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

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THE EDICT OF TORDA

Edict of Religious Freedom Issued at Torda, 1568
King John Sigismund

ACT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

His majesty, our Lord, in what manner he—together with his realm—legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same matter now, in this Diet, reaffirms that in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well. If not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching. For faith is the gift of God and this comes from hearing, which hearings is by the word of God.

UNITARIANISM IN THE KHASI HILLS OF INDIA

Unitarianism In The Hills: An Indigenous Religion With Modern Offshoots

By Helpme H. Mohrmen, minister, Unitarian Church of Puriang, Khasi Hills, India

Rev. Bert Inkson once said, "Unitarianism is rather a religious way of life than a set of belief." Unitarianism hence can be defined as a way of life followed by different people in different parts of the World. Unitarianism's origin as a faith in various parts of the Globe is in fact unique to the culture and surrounding of the area in which it exist. In many cases all around the world where Unitarians Universalist churches present, the movement was originally started by individual who experienced spiritual trial and tribulation within ones self, it could be the individual discontent with the faith that he possessed and was struggling to find new meaning and insight to life. In other words it was started by people in their respective area against conforming to any set of beliefs or tradition dictated by certain authority in the power that is. From a historical point of view its origin as a movement can be trace back to a group of people in early Christian era, under the leadership of Arius who started a debate on the issue of the 'godliness' of Jesus Christ at a Council was held at Nicea in 357 AD. Since it is a way of life followed by people in different Places, of different Races and of different Cultures, Unitarian Universalism in different part of the Globe is therefore as varied as the people that followed it and each has maintain it own uniqueness. Though it varies with the people that followed it, but in spite of the diversity, it however has a certain common belief that the whole church adheres to, prominent among the many are the freedom of belief, respect of other religions and respect of the dignity of a person, are few of the fundamental principle which bind together the Unitarians Universalist the world over.

Unitarianism in Khasi Jaintia Hills and Karbi Anglong District, like any of its sisters in faith in different parts of the World is a unique religion with an equally unique beginning. The later part of eighteen and early nineteen hundred, Khasi Jaintia society witnesses an emergent of giants and stalwarts of Khasi intellectuals and the doyen of Khasi literature in the like of Babu Soso Tham, Pahep R.S. Berry, Nissor Singh and his brother u Babu Hajom Kissor Singh, the list is however by no mean exhausted. The mentioned personalities were great littérateurs, and of these H.K. Singh was not only poet and an essayist par excellence but he is also religious reformer in his own right.

Born to a Khasi family whose father was an employee of the mighty British Empire, the Singhs along with few of their contemporary were perhaps few lucky educated Khasis of the time. It is said that in those days one can count on one's hand the numbers of educated Khasis and H.K.Singh was able to complete his Entrance examination (High School graduate) which is itself a great achievement. H.K. Singh though born a Khasi was converted to Calvinist faith along with the whole family while he was studying at a school in Nongsawlia Sohra. He being an educated and an ardent quest for spiritual truth was well acquainted with the traditional animist religion and read his Bible thoroughly. He read the sacred text from cover to cover and found that the Bible has only reinforced his belief in one God, which in fact is a belief not alien to the Khasis.

His studies of the Bible particularly the Gospels convinced him that Jesus himself; a true Jew to the last; worshiped one God, which he called Abba and taught his disciples to pray to this God the Father when they pray in what is latter to be known as the Lords prayer. At the same time H.K. Singh though he discovered that even the Bible and Jesus teaches about the existence of one true God which is similar to the belief followed by the Khasis, he however is reluctant to go back to the Niamtynrai/Seng Khasi fold (to which he has very close relationship) for other theological intricacies. Basically H.K.Singh was not at ease with what he believed to be the two variant of unreasonable belief that he cannot comprehend and one must remember that the age we are concern see the advent of Christianity and the beginning of the people in the Khasi traditional belief to organise themselves to repel the rapid advancement of this new faith in the hills — the Seng Khasi was also started around this particular period. H.K.Singh was essentially caught between the traditional and new and come up with his own version of truth.

H.K.Singh was juggling and struggling with the new truth that he had discovered, he was in search of a faith or religion, which worship one true God as well freed human from the bondage of other super natural deities and at long last his search led him to his goal. By divine providence he met one Brahmo from (member of Brahmo Samaj) Kolkata on a visit to Shillong who introduced him to Rev. C.H.A. Dahl a Unitarian Missionary stationed at Kolkata (Calcutta). Singh's contact with Dahl was like the proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel' and the correspondence between the two has indeed greatly influenced Singh. The communication between H.K.Singh and C.H.A. Dahl came to an end only in the demise of the later, which had shocked Singh and ironically the tragedy happens only two months before Unitarianism in this Hills saw the light of the day. H.K. Singh in spite of all odds went ahead with his plan and started "*Ka Niam Mane Wei Blei*" Unitarianism in the Khasi Jaintia and Karbi Anglong on the 18th of September 1887 and the rest is history.

Metaphorically speaking Unitarian in the Khasi Jaintia and Karbi Anglong District is like a tree standing tall with its roots deep into the ground and its branches and leaves widely spread receptive of the light and the blessings of the Universe. Its roots are strong and firm in the belief and culture of the people of the region as well as being open to truths from elsewhere.

From a theological point of view, the concept of God Worshipped by the Unitarians in the Hills is the Khasi's own concept of God the Creator (*U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*) (which is) formless. The Khasi concept of God is in contrary to the western concept that they inherited from Judeo-Christian tradition. The concept of God in a western context is God in an "Anthromorphical form." – God on whose image man was created or to be specific God in a human shape. God in Khasi Pnar concept is not only of a formless God but also in contrary to other tribal God or gods; the Khasi Pnar concept of God is that of a Universal God. He is neither a God, which have a territory, nor God, which belong and recognize only his own tribe. H.K. Singh preaches of a formless God and a Universal God and he even went a step further by preaching a dual identity of God ' the motherhood and fatherhood' concept of God. Unitarians therefore worship the Khasi original idea of God- a formless God, a Universal God, a Divine Power and a benevolent Benefactor.

Khasi Pnar is a tribe with its own distinct culture and value system. The genesis of any tribe's culture and value system is based on its Aetiological or Mythological stories handed down by their ancestors since time immemorial from generation to generation. Unitarian treated the

khasi-pnar folklore and legends as aetiological account of the tribe that can neither be describe as historically factual or mere mythologies. Like any other tribes or races in the World, the Khasi-Pnar also has its own genesis the "*Hynniew trep hynniew skum.*" *Hynniew trep hynniew skum* is a folktales or story as important and profound to the Khasis as the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis of the Torah for the Jews and the Old Testament for the Christian or for that matter as solemn as any mythological stories of any race or tribe to itself. The story does not have to be factually true but they certainly have a profound impact on the belief, culture and psyche of that particular tribe or race.

The contemporary Khasi Pnar society witnesses an emergence of radical groups whose aim is to reform the traditions and the culture of the society starting with changing the lineage system of the society. The group's argument is that the matrilineal system that the society is following is detrimental to the future of this tiny society. The Unitarians in the Khasi Jaintia Hills faces no contradiction what so ever between the faiths they followed and the common culture or ethos of the tribe. Believers in western oriented denomination are many a time in a dilemma whether to believe in the teachings of their Sacred Book or to follow the Value System follow by their forefathers since time immemorial. Oftentimes their faith and dogmas being western oriented are in contrary to the prevailing customs and ethos of the society. Being a liberal religion in a unique Khasi Pnar context, the Khasi Unitarians adapt well to the culture and ethos of the society, they follow and lives by the cardinal values of the tribe and continue to respect the traditions values of the tribe. The basic Khasi value system are 'To earn righteousness' (*Ban kamai ia ka hok*), 'To live honorably and courteously and to know and revere God' (*Ban long Tip-briew Tip-Blei*) 'To know and respect one's relation both from mother and father side' (*Ban tip kur tip kha*). These three basic value systems of the Khasi pnars are like the tri-pot stones (*maw byrsiew*) in the hearth of the khasi-pnar's home that provide warmth and feed the entire family. The Unitarians found no contradiction to the Value System; they in fact adhered in letter and spirit to these basic value system. Faiths that were introduce from other areas, they naturally carry with them the ethos and traditions of the area from which they originated. Therefore they remain out of place to the contemporary Khasi-pnar society; and like the proverbial fish out of water they neither belong here nor there. We see that these religious organisations started the process of trying to adapt to the prevailing culture of the people of the area. Inculturalisation or Contextualism is the process of trying to adapt to the prevalent Culture of the area, the feeling of the need to adapt to the prevailing culture of the area itself speak volume about the in-accordance of the faith.

Unitarian church though has an alien name and naturally has the influence of Protestantism in their worship traditions, yet they hold tight and fast the intrinsic values of their tribal value system. In fact Unitarian Universalism Church is itself an all pervading and all-encompassing religion it is inherent to the church to be able to easily accept different variety of thoughts and beliefs. Unitarian church in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, is therefore a liberal church with its roots strong in the Khasi Pnar value system while it is also all encompassing and free reach out to new thoughts and teaching. R.S. Berry in one of the many hymns he generously composed for the Khasi Unitarian hymn book, described Unitarianism as "*Ka niam ieid i'u blei ieid i'u briew*" (The Religion of love God and love fellow human being), this best describe the concept of Unitarian in Khasi Jaintia hills.

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Recommended Reading: Learn about the Philippines and the UUCP

Books:

Maglipay Universalist, A History of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines by Rev. Fred Muir, the UU Church of Annapolis.

to purchase this book, contact the UU Church of Annapolis, 410-266-8044

In our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines by Stanley Karnow. This is a comprehensive history of the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines.

Philippine Society and Revolution by Joe Sison. This book discusses the progressive/liberal wing of the political ideology in the Philippines. It comes highly recommended by Kevin Mann of First UU Church San Diego. It can be attained through the University of the Philippines: <http://www.upd.edu.ph/~uppress/home.html>

Any book by Reynaldo Constantino about Philippine history. Another recommendation by Kevin. This book can also be obtained through the U of the Philippines.

Plundering Paradise: The Struggle for the Environment in the Philippines by Robin Broad with John Cavanagh

Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of WW II's Greatest Rescue Mission by Hampton Sides.

Noli Me Tangere by Jose Rizal. This classic literary work was written by the National Hero of the Philippines during the waning years of the Spanish control of the country.

When Elephants Dance by Tess Uriza Holthe. Awesome historical fiction which brings to life a story of the hope and courage needed to survive in wartime (WW II). This story progresses through the power of folktales and family stories.

Hey, Joe: a Slice of the City- An American in Manila by Ted Lerner. Recommended by a Dumaguete bookstore employee.

Understanding Filipino Values by Thomas D Andres. Also recommended by the Dumaguete bookstore employee.

*Most of these books can be easily found online through Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble.com as used books (quite economical) or located through your library. Others may require more searching.

Websites:

www.uuphilippines.org the website of the UU Church of the Philippines

www.joserizal.ph and www.jose-rizal.edu sites dedicated to the Philippine National hero

www.wowphilippines.com general site

www.calasia.org/countrypages/PhilippinesFrame-Headlines.html links to newspapers

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negros> general info about Negros Island

www.negros-occ.gov.ph/ more about Negros

www.mysiguijor.com information about Siguijor Island, one of our day trip options

www.philippinecountry.com general information

www.itravelphilippines.net general information

www.camperspoint.com general information