

International Religious Connections and Organizations

The Presenters

- Rev. Ralph Tyksinski attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in August 2023
- Marjie and Pete Marion traveled to Transylvania to visit FUS's Partner Church in Nagyajta, Romania in 2005, 2010, 2016 and 1994 (Pete only)
- Nick Schweitzer attended the Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Romania in September 2023



EUROPE IN 1570



King John Sigismund, the first Unitarian King



King John Sigismund's Edict (an official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority) of Torda, 1568:

- “His majesty 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, or not, not 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 (no one) shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the 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...”

Francis David (David Ferenc)



Painting by Aladár Körösfői-
Kriesch, 1896





International
Council of
Unitarians and
Universalists

The Preamble to the Constitution of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists reads:
We, the member groups of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, affirming our
belief in religious community based on: ***liberty of conscience and individual
thought in matters of faith.***

- Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association, 500
- Canadian Unitarian Council, 5,150
- Czech Republic: (Religious Society of Czech Unitarians est. by N. Čapek)
- Hungary: Unitarian Church of Hungary, 25,000
- India: The Indian Council of Unitarian Churches, which includes the Khasi Unitarian Union, 9,000 members,
- Philippines: Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines founded 1954, 2000 members
- Romania: Unitarian Church of Transylvania, 80,000 members
- UK: General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, 6,000 members
- USA: Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), 162,796 (adult members)

Parliament of World's Religions - The Global Interfaith Movement in Chicago, August 2023

This was a five-day event with
over 6000 attendees from over 75 different
countries representing 200 different
religious groups.

Parliament of the World's Religions at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893



The Partner Church of FUS in Nagyajta, Transylvania, Romania

Transylvanian churches: Nagyajta



Village of Nagyajta



Background

In 1991

- Transylvania was poor, disrupted, struggling to find new ways forward after collapse of Romania's communist government in 1989
- Like its neighboring villages, Nagyajta escaped the government's scheduled destruction of thousands of rural villages populated by ethnic Hungarians but needed our support

Nagyajta Agriculture 1990s



Nagyajta's Partnership Invitation

In 1991 Nagyajta's minister invited a delegation from FUS to come and visit, writing:

“We have a common language, that of LOVE, which may be understood by everybody, and I hope, this language may become our common property. I think you can feel in my words this common language of love.”

Early View of the Fortress Church



Nagyajta's Unitarian Church

We shared a religious heritage but found ourselves in a cultural world far older than us

- The church was founded in 1568
- It was built in the 1300s and was Catholic before the Reformation
- Fortress walls were built in 1222 and 1500
- It was restored with EU funding completed in 2022

Nagyajta Church Service



Restored Fortress Church 2022



The Nagyajta-FUS Partnership

- Began in 1992 with a visit by FUS ministers Max Gaebler and Ruth Gibson plus 5 members
- I was able to visit in 1994 and found a church with no minister and damaged by earthquakes but members who were eager to work with us
- Early activities included casting a new church bell, reinforcing the bell tower and organizing youth exchanges between our churches

Max Gaebler



Nagyajta Led our Partnership

- Since Nagyajta had only an elementary school, a scholarship fund was created to support local students needing room and board support at high school and for high school graduates to study at seminary in Kolozsvar
- We attended one scholarship student's investiture as minister in 2010
- Program was expanded to include youth book awards, educational travel, holiday party

Book Awards Day



Partner Celebration in Village



Partners at Church Together



Social Activities and Travel

- FUS members visited Nagyajta, Torda, Kolozsvar, and other important Unitarian sites and Transylvanian cities in 2005 and 2016
- Minister Levente and his wife Jutka visited FUS, Madison and other WI sites in 2009
- FUS holds Hungarian dinners and celebrations with our congregation and others to enjoy traditional Hungarian food, music and dancing

Levente and Jutka at FUS



Partners Cooking Together



Chimney Bread in Nagyajta



Chimney Bread in Madison



Hungarian Dinner at FUS



Hungarian Dance at FUS



More Dancing!



Parish and Blessing Houses

- Minister Levente got funding from FUS and others for church members to build a modern building for small church services and meetings, youth and community groups, zither players, and lodging for visitors
- A small museum building was renovated
- We attended the Blessing House inauguration in 2010
- The ministers' parish home was improved

Building the Blessing House



Blessing House Built!



Blessing House Inauguration



Nagyajta's Winning Zither Group



Conclusions

We have been enriched by:

- Visiting important historical religious sites in Transylvania
- Staying in the homes of UU members in Madison and Nagyajta
- Celebrating Hungarian and American customs, food, music, and culture
- Sharing with Nagyajta as it grows and prospers

Goodbye Nagyajta!



the Congress of the IAFRI (International Association for Religious Freedom) in Cluj, Romania, September 2023

This was a three-day event with 24 sessions, including 5 by the International Association of Liberal Religious Women, and (150?) attendees from (20?) countries representing two dozen different religious groups.

- The IARF is a charitable organization that works for religious freedom around the world. It was founded in Boston in 1900, and “is the oldest international group that promotes dialogues among religions”.

- The IARF has over 90 affiliated religious groups, spread over 20 countries in the world, with a wide range of faiths represented, including denominations of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Shinto, Taoism, Christianity, Juudaism, and Islam.

- In 1972, IARF was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was the catalyst for the formation of the "Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief" in 1989, which was granted formal status with ECOSOC in 1992.

The Unitarian Church and College



Dávid Ferenc

Reformátor

Első Unitárius Püspök

Reformer

First Unitarian Bishop



János Zsigmond

Prince of Transylvania,

who became the only Unitarian monarch in history at the urging of Dávid Ferenc, and in 1568, at a time when much of the rest of Europe was engulfed in religious wars, his Diet passed the Edict of Torda, which prohibited persecution for religious reasons.



College: meetings and residence



Downtown Cluj



Presentation



Presentations

- Reconciliation and Desmond Tutu
- The Religious Freedom Young Adult Network in India
- Panel with Ukrainian Refugees in Cluj
- Reconciliation between Japan and Korea
- The Youth Organization of the Hungarian Unitarian Church
- Japan Chapter Young Adults

Rissho Kosei-kai

“A global Buddhist movement centered on the Lotus Sutra.”

It was founded in 1938 by two breakaway members from another Buddhist sect. The first meeting was held in a house and some 30 people joined at that time.

By 1941, membership had reached 1000, and a “Great Sacred Hall” was completed in 1964.

As of 2010, there are over 240 churches and centers in 20 countries. Membership currently stands at 6.5 million members, with the majority living in Japan.

Discussion Group



Me with representatives from Japan, India, and Germany.

Opening Ceremony in the Unitarian church



Representatives from 12 different faith traditions.

Another European Connection

The Frei-religiöse Gemeinde in Offenbach, Germany



Other Experiences
from the Congregation ...

The message of this presentation on
International Religious
Connections and Organizations
Is to know that even when faced with
Intolerance, threats, and fear for the future,
we are not alone.