

## 400 Years as Unitarians

In 1613 the followers of Ferenc Dávid in the Transylvanian village of Várfalva dedicated their church as Unitarian. Theirs was the first church in the world to use the word Unitarian, and the building has been in continuous use as a Unitarian church ever since.

In 1992 the Várfalva church became partners with Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, Pennsylvania. Last August, Associate Minister Morgan McLean led a group of 14 pilgrims to Várfalva for its celebration of the 400th anniversary of the dedication. One of the pilgrims also visited his partner church in nearby Sinfalva.

A few minutes before 2 p.m. on Sunday, August 18, the village church bell began ringing, signaling that the anniversary celebration was about to begin. The church filled with congregation members and visitors. Staff members of Duna TV, the Hungarian public television network, were present to record the ceremony. A procession of ministers, led by Rev. László Nagy, vice-bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church, strolled along the Main Line Walkway-Sétány (dedicated two nights earlier) to enter the church.

The service began with a hymn, followed by Rev. Nagy's keynote sermon. Rev. McLean talked about our partnership. Rev. Zsolt Barabas, the minister of Várfalva, told the history of the church. After several more speakers, a youth group from the congregation recited poetry and presented a dramatization of a scene from *Egy az Isten*, a novel that portrays the struggles of nineteenth-century Transylvanian Unitarians

The service concluded with an exchange of gifts between the two congregations. The Várfalva church presented an oak plaque commemorating the 400th anniversary, and Main Line presented a photo album documenting 30 years of partnership. The celebration concluded with a festive dinner.



Rev. Morgan McLean presenting her sermon

On the day after our arrival in the village our hosts treated us to a traditional Hungarian dinner at the community hall and told us a surprise was in store for us. After dinner we all gathered in the church courtyard where a post stood wrapped in cloth. With great ceremony the cloth was removed, revealing a hand-carved oak sign for the Main Line Walkway-Sétány honoring the partnership between Várfalva and Main Line.



Jon Bass, of Main Line, and Ernő Kolozsi, of Várfalva

Another memorable day was Saturday the 17th, when we joined our partners at the first summer festival of Unitarian churches in the Kolozsvár-Törda district. Several hundred Unitarians from 12 churches gathered at a park near Törda Gorge. The formal program opened with a sermon. Then came folk singing groups, youth folk dancing groups, and finally a brass band. Elsewhere on the grounds were tents with activities for children and crafts and souvenirs on exhibit and for sale. Each congregation prepared a large kettle of *gulyás* for lunch. A committee of “impartial” tasters sampled every kettle and declared that Várfalva had the best tasting stew.

Throughout our visit, we were charmed by our hosts’ warm hospitality. Most of us made new friends, and those who had visited Várfalva previously strengthened their friendships. We shared our joys and discussed challenges we face. We and our hosts gained insights into how Unitarianism is practiced in each other’s country—the similarities and the differences. Our pilgrimage strengthened our faith and made us realize how essential our partnership is to the missions of our own church and Unitarian Universalism.

By Jonathan Bass  
Main Line Unitarian Church  
Devon, PA