

Dear sisters and brothers, when I was a child, during summertime I spent a lot of time in the orchard of my grandparents on my father's side, in a small village in Eastern Transylvania. The orchard was near a hillside, with a great view over the whole village and the surrounding region. I always found it remarkable that the first thing of the settlements that a far distant person will notice, were the white church steeples. Built in most cases on a hill, the churches, often surrounded by walls, were efficiently protecting the people against the assaults of the Turks and the Tartars. It was only later that I understood the other, more religious reason why our ancestors had built these steeples on a hill: so that one could see where they are from a far distance, so that they help people find their way home, so that people could notice their empowering and quieting presence every time they needed to get in touch with the holy.

My grandfather on my mother mother's side was a Unitarian minister and a professor at the theological seminary in my hometown of Kolozsvár, who had studied a year in the United States, more than 80 years ago. He had also been born in a village with a white church steeple, into a family with several Unitarian ministers, including the father-in-law of his grandfather, my great-great-great-grandfather.

Dear sisters and brothers in our Unitarian faith! I told you about all these not only to describe who I am as a Unitarian and who we are as Transylvanians, but also to tell you that I believe we must be like a white steeple on the hill as a religious community as well. More, there is a calling in this image that our partnership between our two communities should achieve. I believe that we as religious communities have the vocation of standing up for our values, to stand up out there in the world, in the society, in the larger community and show how our spiritual light lives and works on our hilltops, both here in Boston and there, in Kolozsvár.

For those of you who have never heard of it, Transylvania is a Latin word meaning the land behind the forest. Its Hungarian name – Erdély – means the land that is one with the woods. The visitor, on seeing this glorious land for the first time, will find his breath taken away. Just like their environment, the people of this land are wild and welcoming, pure and purifying, simple and satisfied, conscious and appreciative. Transylvania had belonged to Hungary for most of its history, until it was given to Romania in 1920.

There are 1.4 million Hungarians still living there as an ethnic minority and about 60,000 of them are Unitarians, members of the first Unitarian church in the world, founded by Francis Dávid. Our Unitarian ancestors were the first people in the world to proclaim religious tolerance and freedom of conscience as law. It was in 1568 in the town Torda, when John Sigismund was the Unitarian king of Transylvania. He had the power to force Unitarianism onto others; instead, he offered them the right of choice. Paradoxically, after 446 years of proclaiming it as a law, we are still waiting for tolerance in the land of tolerance, both as an ethnic and a religious community.

When he established our church, he also founded a Unitarian College, because he knew that there is no future for our faith without educated, empowered and motivated leaders. This conviction was taken over by all the generations to follow, and proved to be a basic guarantee of the existence of our church throughout history. We survived the darkest persecutions and oppressions of the intolerant 17 th and 18 th centuries also because the church was always able to exploit faithful and responsible leaders. Most of our bishops, presidents, ministers and lay leaders were educated in our Unitarian schools and colleges.

A quarter of a century ago, the New Year of 1990 brought us the gift of liberation from the life-threatening persecution under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu and his communist regime. For the first time in my life, we had real freedom, joy and hopes for the New Year. 25 years of hard transition followed, during which we tried to adapt our society to European norms. Over these years, we reached to change many things for good, but with other realities, we still struggle every day. We know that we are who we are for a reason: to make a difference, to be better people. The challenges to do so are big and more demanding; therefore our efforts need to be more and more focused, concentrated.

I am here to tell you that as religious partners, we can help each other in making a difference; we can be a source of inspiration, faith, energy, dedication, courage, vision for each other. Our challenges today are many. I am sure yours are many as well. So let's talk about these challenges and see which are the ones, where we can be of help for each other. In my understanding, being a partner means to be there for the other, to share and to give, to be available and to be a resource for the other.

Preserving national, cultural and religious identity is the most important challenge that rises every day. Over the centuries, Transylvania was a land of many nations and religions, which lived together in harmony. Today, the country is a space where equality of chance and treatment is not fairly provided for all. Some nations are more preferential than others; some religions are more supported by the state than others. The European Union, of which Romania is a member since 2007, leaves its member states to deal with ethnic and religious issues themselves – so often, this treatment is unfair and prejudiced.

In Romania, making a decent living is still very difficult. National economy struggles to get out of the 25 years transition that passed since the revolution against the communists. Agriculture, a major asset of the country, is the most underdeveloped field of the economy. People in the rural areas, are trying to survive working their lands and growing their crops. The problem is they fail in selling their goods, and making them into cash to sustain the needs of their families.

Access to good education is a common challenge that most of our younger families are facing. Churches have a long history in founding and funding denominational schools, with the clear purpose of providing a chance for all to come and study for free in a rich intellectual and spiritual environment. Their history and experience makes church schools very popular, but often hard to access, because of the lack of support coming from the state, and the poor financial possibilities of the churches to contribute to their expenses. Helping those in need, those weak and sick and lonely shows the social responsibility of the churches.

In urban communities, such as my town, unemployment, poverty, poor medical services are tough realities that affect the life of thousands of old people, youngsters and children. And the church, and also our congregation is trying to answer these needs by sharing gifts of food and clothes over the holidays, giving scholarships to those talented but poor, organizing home care for the old and weak, and through all this, to pay attention. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" – told Jesus to his disciples. Today's religious imperatives also call our attention to the good works of the present. Today, we are to be filled with light and warmth up here, in the city on the hill, but then we need to get down there in the world and spread out our light and warmth. Spread it out among our children and youth, as we teach them how to be good, among the lonely and the needy, as we take over to our shoulders some of their heavy loads.

My closing thoughts call your attention to the essence of the entire religious partnership. Let me conclude with the words of two American Unitarian Universalist ministers, both of whom I know personally.

The Rev. Gary Smith writes in his sermon about their experience: "What does having a partner congregation mean? What does it mean to be in relation to people in Szekeleykeresztur in northern Romania in the Carpathian Mountains in an area called Transylvania? What does it mean to visit there, to leave the main road and to drive through some narrow streets of other villages and to come to a T in the road and to turn right and there is the school, there is the parsonage, there is the church, there is the community house, there is the gate, there is the courtyard, there are the grape vines, there is the garden, there are the chickens, there is the minister and his wife, there are all the people. They have flowers. They have been waiting a long time for us. They are smiling. They are crying. We are smiling. We are crying. And we scramble off the bus into their arms. Who is giving and who is receiving? Throw away the

Hungarian/English dictionaries. Something universal is happening.

And finally a quote from the Rev. Scott Prinster: "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."

Roșia Montană / Verespatak - Movies and Videos

Life over Gold - a Unitarian stand for Roșia Montană

Produced by the Executive Committee of the Hungarian Unitarian Church

Published Jan 11, 2014

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9B_GZOtAFS8

4 min 56 sec

Roșia Montană, Town on the Brink

Written and directed by Fabian Daub

1 hr 18 min 18 sec

Published Sep 26, 2013

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMLhvQ0otuE>

Wide Angle: Gold Futures

Produced by Thirteen/WNET New York for PBS

Based on, and with footage from, New Eldorado - The Curse of Roșia Montană

Published June 1, 2009:

<http://rosia-montana-cultural-foundation.com/2013/01/video-gold-futures-rosia-montana-a-pbs-special/>

55 min 9 sec

Video Segments, Discussion Guide, etc at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/lessons/gold-futures/rosia-montana-and-the-gold-mine/4320/>

Mine Your Own Business: The Dark Side of Environmentalism

This anti-environmentalist “exposé” is included here as an example of the insidiously clever thought-twisting mind games the pro-development forces bring to bear on the conversation

Produced, written and directed by Phelim McAleer and Ann McElhinney

Flora Film International

Published October 17, 2006

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wth_p4p0rfY 2 min 49 sec

Stephanie Roth - The Goldman Environmental Prize

Produced by The Goldman Environmental Prize
Published 2005

<http://www.goldmanprize.org/2005/europe>

4 min 57 sec

Includes short biography, and acceptance speech

New Eldorado - The Curse of Roşia Montană

Produced, photographed and directed by Tibor Kocsis

Flora Film International

Published 2004

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qPY6SqdFis>

1 hr 15 min 49 sec

Roşia Montană Wikipedia Article

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ro%C8%99ia_Montan%C4%83

Roşia Montană Mining Project Wikipedia Article

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ro%C8%99ia_Montan%C4%83_Project

Save Roşia Montană - English web site

News and materials & info for organizing protests.

<http://www.rosiamontana.org/en/media/news-and-press-releases>

The home site for Alburnus Maior, a non-governmental organization based in Roşia Montană, Romania. It opposes the proposed gold mining project of Gabriel Resources.

Roşia Montană Cultural Foundation

“Protecting the Heritage of Romania through Sustainable Development”

<http://rosia-montana-cultural-foundation.com/>

Roşia Montană Gold Corporation

a Romanian company with shareholders: State-owned mining company Minvest Deva-19.31%, Gabriel Resources (GBU) - 80.46% and other minority shareholders - 0.23%

<http://en.rmgc.ro/>

The Golden Way - Cultural tourism in the Roşia Montană area

“... part of a 'greenways' initiative . It aims to help you explore the village of Rosia Montana and invites you to come and visit this beautiful place in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains . This site features a wide variety of activities for both; young and old and reflects on Rosia Montana 's unique cultural heritage shaped by its two thousand year old history.”

<http://rosia-montana-cultural-foundation.com/>

The campaign "Save Rosia Montana" - Report VI from the EU “Evening with Ombudsman

<http://bit.ly/LoNrvD> - fall? 2013

“The Romanian campaign "Save Rosia Montana" was a showcase example of social involvement (of both the local community and of residents in the entire country) in the actions intended to raise the issue of respecting fundamental rights. The residents of the zone in which a mine was to be founded formed an organisation in order to fight for their rights. The steps taken by the organisation led to the concentration of a desired degree of social mobilisation around the issue. . . ”

The Letter from the Hungarian-speaking historic Churches in Romania Opposing the RGMC Project in Roşia Montană - on the UUPCC’s web site

<http://bit.ly/LoMkff> - 16 September 2013

Open Letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs and MP Re: Destructive Mining Abroad

<http://bit.ly/1d0blVu> - 5 December 2013

Friends of the Earth article about the letter @ <http://bit.ly/1d0aFzc>