

The Communicator

Volume 21, Issue 1

the newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

Spring, 2003

The World of the Women of Transylvania

UUWF has joined the Transylvania Unitarian Women's Alliance and the Partner Church Council. Our first involvement will be matching UUWF members with some of the women over there as Pen Pals. We are very excited and eager to get to know each other. Ferenci Eniko, Secretary of TUWA, is our contact there because she speaks English and will be doing a lot of the translating for us.

This article was written by their honorary President, Dr. Judit Gellerd, and we wanted to share it with all of you. UUWF is seeking members who are willing to be Pen Pals with members of the Transylvania Unitarian Women's Alliance as we seek to explore and deepen our relationship with them. Women wishing to have a Pen Pal can contact UUWF Board member, Barbara Paton Gardner, by e-mail at activistuu@aol.com to volunteer.

There are two kinds of American Unitarian Universalists: those who had visited Transylvania and those who will visit. Transylvania – today part of Romania – is the land

where religious tolerance and freedom of conscience took roots and the world's oldest Unitarian church established in 1568. Although we are born into our faith, it never came cheap to practice our religion. Each generation had to fight for this basic right, find renewal from within during persecutions.

Transylvania is my homeland, and my destiny.

I am holding in my hand the freshly published first Communicator issue of the Transylvanian Unitarian Women's Alliance. The Communists banned religious organizations and their journals for 50 years. But they could never extinguish the passion of these Unitarian women to practice their faith through actions of compassion, to carry on committed social work in their churches and communities. Their testimonies in this booklet are heroic tales.

There is a significant difference between women's social experience in Central-Eastern Europe and America. First of all, we have never experienced real

discrimination against women in Eastern Europe, not even under the Communist regime. Paradoxically, we were hermetically sealed from the world, yet had rela-



Dr. Judit Gellerd
Honorary President,
Partner Church Council

tive freedom to pursue our intellectual dreams. I was trained as concert violinist and then as a medical doctor with two specializations – on government expense. Job security, subsidized housing, free health care, high culture were widely available. Women were proud, frivolous, accomplished. It was good to be a woman in Transylvania.

Of course, I did not forget the fear from the secret police which permeated our life.

Women were sexually abused, mothers coerced to give birth to a minimum of four children before age 45. Any abortion was considered criminal by the secret police, and the army of orphans was growing exponentially as mothers bled to death. Women and men were sentenced to long political imprisonment in Romania's Gulag prison system – my father among them, while my mother was continually harassed by the secret police for two decades. But she proved to be stronger, and never compromised her integrity. My father chose active martyrdom rather than become a collaborator.

My brother and I joined the mass exodus under Ceausescu and fled the country.

Today each of the 200 Unitarian churches of Transylvania enjoys the blessings of a covenantal relationship with a North-American UU partner church. Half of the fresh seminary graduates of Transylvania are women. American support for education, social pro-

(Continued on page 3)

Linda's Window

This is really an ironic title for my column since my office, actually 90 percent of my office building, doesn't have windows. I guess I was dreaming.

The UUWF has been doing a lot of dreaming lately, trying to figure out how we are going to look in the future. There is a team of very dedicated members who

have taken on this project and will be reporting back to the membership on their findings. In fact, UUWF has set aside one entire workshop at General Assembly 2003 for this purpose.

It is time for us to really examine our structure. Thirteen groups did not renew this year... not because they didn't want

to, but because circumstances prevented it. The fact is that the UUWF membership is aging and the organization now needs to come to terms with exactly what this means. UUWF will celebrate a remarkable anniversary this year – number 40 – and we are now at a crucial place in deciding how we will look in the next 40 years.

I hope you will all take the time to evaluate the recommendations of the Restructuring Task Force, talk with us at GA in Boston, and then help implement the institutional and organizational changes that are put forth.

In faith,
Linda



Task Force on UUWF Restructuring Seeks Comments, Ideas

Charge to the Task Force on UUWF Restructuring

Adopted October, 2002 by UUWF Board

- ☞ To study UUWF's historical and current structure, bylaws, purposes, governance and finances;
- ☞ To imagine new ways to organize in keeping with the Board's strategic directions, including: structuring for ongoing transformation, increasing quality and quantity of communications, aligning resources with vision;
- ☞ To investigate and understand legal possibilities for change within the requirements of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts;
- ☞ To interview a diverse sampling of UUWF's constituency including past Board members, local UUWF members in congregations, individual members, young adults and relevant denominational leaders;
- ☞ To report back to the UUWF Board in October 2003 with observations and recommendations.

At its October meeting, the UUWF Board appointed a Task Force to look at the organization of the UUWF. Appointed were former UUWF presidents Denny Davidoff, Arlene Johnson and Phyllis Rickter (co-chair), and current board members Patsy Sherrill Madden (co-chair) and Justice Waidner. This group has met by phone and defined some tasks.

The Task Force will present a workshop at General Assembly to elicit thoughts and suggestions from members and women who are interested in the UUWF. We expect to create a survey, based on infor-

mation gathered during the workshop, to be sent to our membership over the summer. Our charge directs us to make recommendations to the Board in October.

Please feel free to contact any of us with your thoughts and suggestions. You can reach us at the following email addresses:

- ☞ *Denny Davidoff*
DenOff@aol.com
- ☞ *Arlene Johnson*
AJohnsonPR@cox.net
- ☞ *Patsy Sherrill Madden*
psmadden@mac.com
- ☞ *Phyllis Rickter*
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Transylvania, cont. from p. 1

grams, cottage industry – the famous red embroideries decorate UU churches – has made

Consider engaging into a formal partnership with your sister organizations in Transylvania. You will be spiritually transformed.

social-charitable and cultural activities of the Transylvanian Women's Alliance much more effective. And they are proud of their power and good work.

The UUWF Lanning Fund generously helped the

35 ministers' widows in Transylvania with \$6,600 in 2000 and the 37 widows with \$7,400 grant in 2002. There is real hope that it will be repeated once again for 2003.

These widows, women of great integrity, had served alongside their husbands as co-leaders of their community, as religious educators, music directors – occasionally bell ringers and nurses. They never had a salary of their own. Branded as “enemies of the people,” they were deprived from holding state jobs during the totalitarian regime. Today as a most vulnerable group of retirees in a chaotic Romanian economy, these once

respected community leaders live in abject poverty.

Help had never been more appreciated and hoped for by these widows than the UUWF grant.

Unitarian women of Transylvania dream boldly. They recently designed a social care program for the elderly and disabled of the city of Kolozsvár [Cluj]. The work will be the labor of love by members of the Unitarian Women's Alliance. I am the spokesperson of their appeal to you, Sisters in faith: “Please, consider engaging into a formal partnership with your sister organizations in Transylvania. You will be spiritually transformed,

like those thousands of Unitarian Universalist pilgrims who have been touched by the spirit of Transylvania. And your generosity will help them turn their dream into a blessing for a struggling community of the oldest Unitarian church of the world.”

Dr. Gellerd is the daughter of a famous Transylvanian Unitarian minister, Imre Gellerd, and has been living for some time in the United States. She is passionately committed to the cause of saving Transylvanian Unitarianism and has the knowledge and contacts in Transylvania that the program needs.



About the UUWF Clara Barton Internship for Women's Issues *A Letter from the UUWF Presidents' Circle*

As reported in the last issue of the *Communicator*, UUWF sold the site of the Clara Barton Birthplace and Camp in North Oxford, MA, to the Barton Center for Diabetes Education, Inc. After considering several options, the UUWF decided to use the proceeds of the sale to endow an internship in the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy and Witness to focus on social

justice issues pertaining to women. Because of the deeply meaningful legacy of our Universalist forebear, Clara Barton, the internship will carry her name.

The UUWF has donated an initial \$200,000 to endow the internship. We are asking organizations and individuals who share our vision of a world where women are truly equal to help us

match this gift. We are also looking for \$15,000 to allow us to hire the first intern in June, 2003, while the endowment funds are being raised. The cost of the internship is approximately \$30,999 per year, including a modest stipend, health coverage and other benefits, and training for participants.

During this past year, three UU young adults

have held internships in the Washington Center for Advocacy and Witness. These positions have provided rich opportunities for them to learn how to do advocacy work and link their efforts with grassroots UU groups. In addition, they have volunteered in local programs and also have jointly participated in a reflection process to better understand the

(Continued on page 4)



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Clara Barton Internship, *cont. from page 3*

theological implications
of their work.

If you would like more detailed information about the Clara Barton Internship for Women's Rights, please contact the UUWF office in Boston. In these difficult times, we must think beyond the gains of the past 30 years towards a vision of a world where women are truly equal, whether it takes us five years or 50 to realize that vision. We hope you will support the UUWF's generosity in working toward realizing this vision.

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