

Special Cairns Section

Pilgrimage to Unity's Partner Church
in
Homoródszentpéter, Transylvania, Romania



Introduction to *Cairns* Special Section: Pilgrimage

For twenty years, Unity Church-Unitarian has been on a pilgrim's journey, with small cohorts traveling to Transylvania roughly biennially to visit historical sites in the birthplace of Unitarianism and to stay with the members of our sister church in the small village of Homoródszentpéter. It is a partnership between churches that was fostered by the Unitarian Universalist Association and a number of Unity Church members many years earlier, but it took on new depth with the regular pilgrimages that began in 2001.

There, in a rural, mostly Unitarian town of two hundred Hungarians nestled in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, for two decades the villagers have generously opened their hearts and homes to their American siblings in faith. Now, almost two hundred pilgrims from Unity Church, hearts opened too, have seen with new eyes as pilgrims do, and returned home with new understandings, deeper faith, and a lasting relationship with the people of Homoródszentpéter, with their fellow pilgrims and with the long history of Unitarianism.

What does it mean to travel as pilgrims? It can be many things, but all require an intentional openness to transformative encounter. Encountering the known and unknown in the world, in others, and in ourselves. It would be hard for any pilgrim to return home unchanged.

These submissions to *Cairns* from pilgrims who have traveled to Homoródszentpéter and from the minister of Unity's partner church there attempt to share that experience, while underscoring a continued commitment to the transatlantic kinship now almost two hundred strong on either side of the ocean. As some of the writings note, it is no simple relationship, crossing significant differences in language, theology, geography, politics, and more. But in a week of sharing meals and housing, worship and conversation, hiking and singing, dancing and crying and laughing, we become kin. And perhaps because of our many differences and because of the polarization of our times, the kinship experienced feels particularly transformative and full of grace—offering, as it does, a glimpse of the beloved community we strive to make real, with all the gifts and the challenges of opening our hearts to one another.

A Pilgrim's Progress in Transylvania
or
Surprises and Epiphanies in Transylvania
or
Open Arms in a Grand and Sacred Land
Dane Smith

On their return from important journeys, travelers often are asked: What was the best part, the most memorable or surprising moment? As one of twenty-two Unity Church members on the 2019 Transylvania Pilgrimage, I've tended to ignore these requests for just one moment, and I respond with a torrent of stories, with probably too much enthusiasm and information. Which, I suspect, is what zealous religious pilgrims since time immemorial have been wont to do.

Let us count the epiphanies.

First, the grandeur of the landscape startled me, and had me sighing or gasping from the moment our bus first climbed up and out of the hot Hungarian plain, a few hours east of Budapest. The Transylvania highlands undulate in broad sweeping valleys and swells. The golden slopes have been sustainably cultivated for decades and seem to have escaped the ravages of corporate agriculture. The valleys are settled on the bottoms in ancient ochre-roofed villages and unspoiled little cities. The ridges are topped with dark green forests carefully preserved for centuries. We were told those woods often served as hiding places from the latest invader and yet another wave of totalitarian religious orthodoxy and persecution.

One small inducement for would-be pilgrims is to see this enchanting region before it is further "discovered" and commercialized. In an article published two months after our return, the *Financial Times* declared that Transylvania was becoming "the new Tuscany," a hot new destination for trendy travelers. The author waxed poetically about bucolic landscapes, wildflower meadows, linen-covered outdoor tables spread with delectable local wines and organic dishes, ochre-tiled houses, and fortified churches and castles. But of course, experiencing the region on a pilgrimage is and always will be so much richer than all that.

For us, much of that richness lies in the religious and political history, a complex and often tragic chronicle of violent conflict, persecution, and resistance. This province truly is the closest thing to an international Holy Land for Unitarian Universalists, who trace our original ideas, if not direct ancestry, to the founding of a brand-new Unitarian faith by Francis David. His influence helped produce the Edict of Torda, an unprecedented policy of religious toleration decreed by a sympathetic King John Sigismund in 1568. We visited many of the sacred places where this story unfolded, and about a dozen of the oldest Unitarian churches. Standing outside the church in Torda, looking up at a banner marking the 450th anniversary in 2018 of Transylvania as the "Land of Religious Freedom," was a goosebumps moment for me.

Another high point, literally and figuratively, came a week later when we gathered in a circle of somber observance of David's martyrdom in the hilltop fortress overlooking Deva, where our founder died in prison just a

decade after the Edict. We gained insight on the fragility of civil and religious liberty, especially in light of the rise of so-called “illiberal democracy” today.

Above all else, I was most affected by the kind and gentle people in the tiny village of Homoródszentpéter, our home for a week, where almost all of the two hundred inhabitants are Unitarians and members of Unity Church’s venerable partner church there, led by Kinga Réka Székely. They enveloped us in a familial embrace that has been enjoyed now by more than 125 Unity members on twelve pilgrimages since 2001. We were pampered and catered to, fed delectable home-cooked Hungarian specialties, treated to fresh produce and food raised in the fields behind their houses, and served by bright young interpreters who struck me as remarkably knowledgeable, well-travelled, and wise beyond their years. The villagers drove us on day trips to important sights in the region and guided us on a nature walk up a wilderness canyon.

The Toths, our host family, and other villagers patiently answered all our questions, and freely talked about their own personal struggles with economic and health issues, the stuff of all our everyday lives. Similarly, I was inspired by the exquisite sensitivity displayed by my fellow pilgrims, who refrained from complaining about inconveniences and the lack of minor creature comforts such as air-conditioning, and who trod carefully around differences in culture and political philosophy.

And there are important differences. One of the most important epiphanies was the realization that, on the specifics of here-and-now geopolitical matters and even religious philosophy, I probably have more in common with liberal Catholic and Lutheran activists and various humanists in Minnesota than I do with my new Transylvanian Unitarian (TU) friends, who are a relatively conservative and rural people. Women and men sit separately in church services, and the texts and readings are considerably more Christian and biblical than our own. They are not precisely in lockstep with us on gender and GLBTQ equity or on the embrace of racial and cultural diversity, although individual Transylvanian Unitarian ministers are beginning to speak out and urge the church organization to take a position for marriage equality. And Kinga herself was a pioneer, as one of the region’s first female ministers.

TUs, compared with UUs, also tend towards nationalist and ethnic pride, which is understandable given that they are Hungarians stranded in Romania for most of a century. After Austria-Hungary was defeated in World War I, Northern Transylvania including Székely Land found itself in Romania for twenty years, after which it was ceded back to Hungary under the Third Reich. But again, finding themselves on the wrong side of history, Northern Transylvania was returned to Romania following World War II.

Since then, the entire Transylvanian Hungarians minority, not just Unitarians, have been systematically persecuted and marginalized at times by the Romanian and Orthodox majority, and especially so under the extremely brutal Communist regime of Nicolae Ceaucescu. Our church actually has played a role going back more than sixty years in providing refuge for this oppression. This is something for which Dr. Judit Gellérd, a Unitarian minister from the region, thanked us, in a sermon delivered at

Unity Church in March of 1997. Reading through a transcript of that sermon, I was delighted to see a connection to our host family in the village, and that Unity had specifically sponsored refugees Endre and Karola Toth in the 1950s.

The day before we left, our hostess Magda Toth gave us each a little, bright blue flag of the historical Székely Land, and we learned that flying this flag in Romania is still officially discouraged and can bring repercussions. Although we didn't discuss national politics much with our host family, we were told by our guides that many Transylvanians tend to be supportive of nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. A villain in the eyes of American liberals, Orbán is considered to be in the same boat with Russia's Vladimir Putin and other authoritarian leaders. For me, this has not been an easy difference to navigate. I like to consider myself a global citizen first, a brother to the entire human family, then a Unitarian Universalist, then an American, then a Minnesotan, and on down to less important tribal allegiances.

I haven't figured out how to reconcile all this contradiction and tension. I do know that the pilgrimage helped me learn again and in new ways that we don't have to think alike to love alike (a quote often mistakenly attributed to Francis David, but which most likely originated with Methodist founder John Wesley). I know now, more than ever, that I have to figure out a way to love those in my own community who disagree with me, and find solutions that achieve racial equity, economic and social justice, and climate action. And I know that I'm determined to return to Homoródszentpéter, on my own or on another pilgrimage, and to do whatever I can to strengthen these bonds, to keep our partnership alive and well far into the future.

A model pilgrim in this regard was Gary DeCramer, a Unity member and former state senator from rural southwestern Minnesota, who returned several times after a first pilgrimage and pitched in with his own sweat equity and farming expertise to assist the village. He also served on the board of Project Harvest Hope, a national nonprofit dedicated to renewing civil society and sustainable agricultural development in Transylvania. DeCramer passed away in 2012, a loss felt as deeply in Homoródszentpéter as in St. Paul. When we formally presented the Minnesota state flag that stood in DeCramer's Senate office to the church during their Sunday service, the tears and smiles among many in the congregation bore moving witness to the depth of this relationship between our beloved communities.

Replicating that level of commitment would be difficult for most of us, including me, but serving as a shameless unpaid promoter of the Transylvania Pilgrimage will be one of my side hustles for the foreseeable future. I will persistently echo what Judit Gellérd said to us in that 1997 service, "Be pilgrims yourselves, go and recharge your spirit by their love!"



The Homoródszentpéter Church Tower Linda Mandeville

Tales of a Clergywoman
Rev. Kinga-Réka Székely
Translated by Emőd Farkas

Beloved Transience

In 2037, if the Lord wills, we shall still live. I will be happily preparing my farewell sermon. I will look back on forty years of service. Storm, desert, blizzard, flood—such metaphors I will be using to evoke the difficult periods of my ministerial service. Eden, heavenly beatitude, passion till death, liberating devotion—such things I will mention to mark the easiest of times.

The continuous passing of time is a comforting and revolting reality. Persistently and stubbornly, just like water splashing forth from a spring, like the rising and the setting sun, time passes irresistibly.

"Mom, is yesterday today?" my youngest child asked almost every morning when learning the designations for time cut into pieces: past, present, and future.

I answered, "Yesterday is today. It always is."

This year, we started to weave strip carpets with the women of the congregation, on a loom made in 1944. All parts of the weaving loom were fabricated of wood. Even, beautiful carvings adorned its prominent parts. A father had made it for his marriageable daughter. The girl turned into a married woman and held her father's gift in high esteem: She wove a lot on it.

We treadle, the two sets of warp yarn part; we use the shuttle to pass the rag strips through the warp; we press the treadle again; the warp yarns catch the rag strips, and then we finish by beating with the reed. Row by row, millimeter by millimeter, our carpet is growing, the warp yarns and the rag strips lessen.

Yesterday is today. On the weaving looms of our lives, God is the weaver. Our spiritual values and talents represent the material we put between the warp yarns. The beams and the harnesses, the frame and the treadles signify the value systems and social norms that frame our lives. I would still love to weave on this loom in 2037, with the wisdom, the perseverance, and the joy of those elderly women who are weaving today.

"Do you recall the time when we were girls?" asks Katica Néni. "We would wait for the last wooden spindle to fall off the loom, and the first one to pick it up would run out with it to the street to find out who her husband would be. From the direction the first person came, the suitor would also arrive. What a bewilderment it was when the first person had not shown up from the expected direction!"

Flying time, the shaping of the variegated hand-woven fabric on the loom of our lives always reminds me that yesterday is today. We must love each and every millimeter, every treadle, every reed beating of this fabric. We must enjoy everything we spend time on. This is our only chance to avoid feeling sorrow over transience.

Time as a Mask/Disguise

Elek Jakab, a disciple of Sándor Aranyosrákosi Székely (bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church 1845-1852), wrote that the bishop failed to become notable in spite of his God-given talents, because he liked very much to rest, dally, walk, and take siestas. It is the irony of fate that the bishop died at fifty-five during an episcopal visitation.

This tragic-comic old story brings us to the issue of time. What do I have time enough for? As a minister I frequently get the explanation on Sunday afternoons: "If I had enough time, I would have gone to church." In fact, I am glad to hear this. The truth would sound so much more painful! It would hurt if someone plainly told me: "I don't go to church because it is impossible to follow your lengthy sentences lasting five minutes. I don't go because Unitarians always talk beside the point; they don't believe this, they don't believe that, they don't even know what they believe. I don't go to church because the sacred texts are plain, the prayer is cold, and the psalms sound false. I don't go to church because I don't need it."

So, I let them mislead me. It's good to hear the deceitful explanation: "If I had enough time, I would have gone to church, because I long to go there."

Yet God knows and sees that if I wish to go to, say, Greenland, then I go. I call my mother to take care of my children. I ask my neighbor colleagues to help me out with church service. I ask the cantor lady to look after the Sunday school, borrow some money, hitchhike to Denmark, and there I board a fishing-boat bound to Greenland, if I indeed want to go there. But I do not want to. For who's interested in muskoxen and fishy-smelling ringed seals?

One Sunday, at the age of fifty-five or even earlier, I may well breathe my last. But until then I want to see my fellow Unitarians dallying with God and resting on Sunday afternoons.

As long as God gives us life, we are also given time. It is up to us to decide how we use it or use it up; whether we dedicate it to fishy seals, reality shows, cursing, perhaps taking siestas, participating in conversations, or praying.

Religiosities

The holy tent framed up for the festivity was just being pulled down when we passed the main square of town with my eldest son. The tent had stood on top of a dismountable stage, over an altar that had been erected there. A crucifix, painted in white, leaned against the back of the stage. We almost fell over it as we passed, as we were looking at the merchant stands along the road.

"What is this?" my elder born asked.

"A crucifix," I answered, "the most important religious object for certain Christian denominations, placed in a central location in their churches."

“Would that man over there, crucified on the cross, be Jesus?” my son asked in a skeptical tone.

“Yes, he is. Many Christians believe that God sacrificed his/her son Jesus, for the sins of mankind, and those who believe that think that if they do so, God will save them from sin and their lives from eternal damnation.” Disapproval appeared on the face of my eleven-year-old son.

“How degrading! I don’t think Jesus would like us to see him that way. Jesus is the master, right? He walks with his disciples, and teaches people, and he drives out the money changers from the church. Jesus sows the seeds, because he is the Sower, and he teaches everyone to pray ‘Our Father.’ Isn’t that true? Didn’t we learn that? Didn’t you teach us so?”

As when a good answer can hardly be found, when I am aware that anything I might say can and will be used against me, I start the sentence with a “Well, yes,” and then continue with a wise and simple, “true and not so true.”

It is true that we do not have a crucifix in our churches, because we believe that God shows his/her love to all people alike, and we also believe that every human being is responsible for their own deeds, and sins cannot be transferred upon someone else.

It is also true that we have known Jesus as a powerful, happy and serene teacher, whom we do not worship, but whose teachings and life example we try to follow.

But it is also true that we respect the religions of others, and that we try to avoid using offensive expressions with reference to the dogmas and the religious objects of other religions. I do not like Jesus on the cross either, because for me crucifixion represents the evil flowing out of blind and impotent people. A loving God, in my opinion, does not solve the problems of the universe with a sacrifice, but rather sends prophets from time to time to lead people back to him/her. Jesus of Nazareth was sent as a relief to us, and not as a ransom, for we cannot pay a ransom for our souls, we can only entirely render our souls to God.

It is also true that it would be premature to talk about the existence and meaning of suffering to a happy and healthy eleven-year-old child. I could perhaps tell him here is a slap in your face that hurts, so that you remember when true pain eventually reaches you, that I did warn you that suffering is also part of our lives.

Of course, I only thought that, and did not say it aloud. I only asked my offspring, still a lover of Jesus, that he remember to keep in his mind the strong, kind, teaching and praying Jesus, even when he would be very sad for some reason.

“I can promise that, I think,” the answer came.

Imperfection Forever

Like hobbled horses, we are staggering in the funeral procession. We would have liked to escape from the freezing truth of death, yet it is not possible. We watch the grey-haired widow, the painfully wailing mother, the brother

broken down. We see the two orphans in our mind's eyes. Then Susan spoke: "How terrible that we do a baptizing ceremony in fifteen minutes but can hardly finish a burial ceremony in two hours. How strange that we are unable or do not want to say a lot for a starting life, and yet we wail and shout after a life that is going away." I mumbled something as an answer to her, but the revelation is still chasing me.

The revelation is that we illuminate our earthly imperfections upon eternal life. How pitiable it is that while we are here in this world, while we have the chance to give signals with earthly senses, we fail to do it. But when the eternal steps into our lives—the mysterious, iridescent, and awe-inspiring transformation—we immediately want to improve the way we are perceived. At once we have enough time and strength to travel as much as hundreds of kilometers in order to soothe our consciences and walk with the dead on his last earthly journey. What a pitiful marionette play! Just like when a grudge-bearing neighbor thinks that his presence in the funeral march should be seen as an honor. Idiocy. Foolishness. Stupidity. Do we hope that the buried fellow will speak back to us from eternity and as an indulgent, meek teacher will big-heartedly excuse our unjustified absences in his/her life?

This writing is not meant to be a testament, but still, let me make it clear: Those who do not have enough time in this world to visit a friend, a relative or an acquaintance, to spend time with him or her, should not bother to stumble in a funeral procession, because the expected absolution will hardly come. Caterwauls like, "At least I could come to the funeral," will not bring the hoped-for spiritual ease.

Let's think the story over and over again. Although our imperfection often knocks against death, it does not come to an end there. Imperfection lasts forever. The nature of eternity also depends on us. Let's not waste time from our lives on earth!



Best and Brightest Memory
Elaine Ambrose

I heard Kinga preach at Unity Church in the late 1990s. She was in St. Paul studying theology as a result of the sister church program of the Unitarian Universalist Association. To me, she seemed exotic, solid, and solemn. Seeing her in August 2018 in her hometown of Homoródszentpéter was affirming. Over twenty years later and in her home environment, I immediately recognized the young woman I had met in St. Paul in the mature woman I saw before me.

During our stay in the village, we learned that Kinga wishes to have portions of her memoir published in the United States. Though we are such different people from such different cultures and mindsets, I greatly identified with Kinga's need to tell her story to the world. Visiting with her and her family as part of a Unity Pilgrimage to Transylvania was transformative. The pilgrimage is now my best and brightest memory from forty years of attending and loving Unity Church.

Why a Pilgrimage? Hal Freshly

When I first heard about the chance to go on a pilgrimage to Transylvania, I thought of it as a once-in-a-lifetime journey to a holy site. I was actually put off by the word “pilgrimage,” and that the area called Transylvania could possibly be *holy*, or might touch me in a way that would feel spiritual. And with my skepticism, I was afraid that I’d be a bad pilgrim. I might fail to appropriately venerate the site (the village of Homoródszentpéter), and I wouldn’t know what to do there. But I thought I’d hear Eastern European music and I signed up anyway, joining a group of others from Unity to go on a pilgrimage. I have now been on seven pilgrimages to Transylvania, most recently in June 2019.

That first visit, back in 2008, was a great trip in all the conventional ways, but more importantly, it became an actual pilgrimage for me. I learned three things about pilgrimages. First, a pilgrimage is a journey with fellow travelers. It is a trip taken together, and the time spent on the road is a time when you can’t help but learn about each other. Like the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, every person in the group has a story, and the time spent “getting there” gives everyone a chance to discover the unique person inside each fellow traveler.

Second, I learned that there are indeed places in Transylvania that seemed like sacred sites to me. I felt like I was standing on holy ground in front of the plaque that commemorates the Edict of Torda (1658), the first declaration of the freedom of conscience in religion. In the vast sweep of history, our heritage of religious tolerance has relatively few such epochal events. Hearing the story and being in the actual place where this took place had an unexpectedly strong impact on me.

Finally, sometimes a pilgrim brings back a souvenir from their journey. The people who live in the village of Homoródszentpéter showed such an open hospitality to me and my fellow travelers that I found myself opening to them as well. And that transcendent feeling of openness to others, once experienced, is, for me, a lasting memento.

And why have I gone back? The answer for me is exactly in the word *pilgrimage*: the opportunity to set aside our daily routines, our customary contacts, our preferred foods, our usual reactions, our habitual selves and to be on a different track for a while, in an unfamiliar place. Being a pilgrim invites us to see, as Rob Eller-Issacs often says, “with pilgrim eyes,” to see our world—our values, our very purpose in life—objectively, as though from the outside. And all this in the company of others who are doing the same thing, temporarily disjointed from the mundane, getting a glimpse of who we really are, what we really value, and why we’re really here.

Every return trip deepens my ability to know myself, as well as to know our partners in Transylvania. I have grown to appreciate the very deep notion of relationship and of our *covenant* with our partners in Homoródszentpéter—our mutual commitment to continue to grow in love for each other, and to keep our “promises of the heart.”



The Bell Ringer

Barbara Hubbard

For the Love of the Bell
Barbara Hubbard

The sun is rising through the mist. The village and the valley are waking up—roosters crowing, storks clapping, cows mooing their greetings to each other, villagers taking their cans of milk to market by truck or by bike.

I rise early as the sky is getting light to meet the village bell ringer Anna for the 5:45 morning bell. We greet each other with a hug and a kiss, only having met each other the evening before. Anna has been ringing the bells in the village church tower every day for thirteen years—sunrise, noon, and sunset—to mark the passage of night to day and day to night, to call villagers to worship, and to alert the village to emergencies. She rings for five minutes each time, rhythmically, religiously—her duty, her calling. We can't speak each other's language, but we share a deep affection out of our love for the bell.

Deep affection between us grows out of a common, simple love. I long for that affection. We all, as human beings, long for that affection. I see the longing in the eyes of the other pilgrims and the eyes of our village friends. I hear it as we raise our voices and sing "Virágom" (Flower), as we step together to the music and sweep each other in circles of dance. We share a joy and an affection that transcends all boundaries of country and language and history.

My faith is shining, sparked by this affection among us and by the stories of people from the past who dreamed of peace through religious tolerance and a belief in one god. I feel a call to reconciliation, with myself, with others, with my god. "Isten áldjon" (God be with you).

June 23, 2019

Despite the discomfort, despite all my complaining, the Village and another just over the hill are graven on my heart. Most of my friends have turned away, eager for new and different opportunities or dismayed [that] our friends here won't condemn Mr. Orban, the ruler in Budapest. But I remain loyal. In the end it's all about love. We have leaned into a strength here and I, for one, will not betray my promises.

We spent the morning with Sandor Kovacs at the House of Religious Freedom. His humility and the discipline of his practice as an historian tempers the UU tendency to self-aggrandizement. I consider that humility part of my work both here and at home, even as I try to ennoble the building stones of our religious heritage by telling an inspiring story. It is a complicated dance.

You...full cord
perfectly stacked
as though summer was already fading
with winter on the way.
I do so love your way of being at the ready
Should the snow fall sooner than we think.

June 24, 2019

The service was magnificent. The Lord's Prayer in Hungarian and English at once was a magical acrostic that called love down into that sweet blue room. And the Minnesota flag that flew in Gary DeCramer's Senate office was the best gift ever given. Tears flowed freely. There was even laughter amidst the tears. It was a beautiful moment. We sang "Gathered Here" and later "Dona Nobis Pacem." Janne and I both spoke about the many meanings of the flag. We committed to continuing the partnership. I hope we offered more than good intentions.

June 28, 2019

It was a stroke of genius bringing Karen Hering here. Alongside the flag we planted in the church, her being here says yes to all we've tried to build together, much of which is a web up in the air. She says she will still spin when we have dried up at the edge of it all. And so the hope contains the grief, and death, as the poet says, "has no dominion."

Just as we sat down to eat the goulash at the final feast, rain blew in and forced us into the stalls of the old barn. Proximity made it easier to hear and so we sang for hours. Imre brought out the accordion his son had given him just before the cancer killed him. He hadn't been able to play it. It seemed as good a time as any to let his grief flow through his hands and sing. At our best we do that for each other.

You... mourning dove
insistent as a baby
rooting for her mother's breast—
yours cannot always be the only music.
Sometimes grief gives way to song.

Found in Translation
Linda Mandeville

Our band of pilgrims traveled by bus to Transylvania in Romania. We sang. We sang "For the Beauty of the Earth" as wheat fields rolled by in the sun-brushed foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Hours later it rained, and the bus windows framed a double rainbow plastered against the gray-black sky. We are American Unitarians, and our primary symbol is the chalice. A rainbow, however, will do in a pinch.

As the days unfolded there were many moments of light and truth and love. We took a wagon ride up into the hills near the village where we were staying. Two of our fellow pilgrims had learned a Hungarian folk song before we left St. Paul, and with their legs dangling off the back of the wagon, sweetly sang the song as our guides stopped the horses for a water break.

These fit young men, who must walk up and down the hills' winding path at least once a day, heard the song and came over to the singers. The men's faces softened into those of young boys as they recognized their own Hungarian folk tune. The song was about a flower, and so they presented the singers with flowers plucked from the roadside. The common language was that of music and gratitude.

Crossroads at Dawn and Beyond
Karen Hering

Where We Meet in Homoródszentpéter

First the storks clacking
their beaks in the darkness
before dawn.

Then the dogs barking
behind their gates
and a single sparrow

chipping away at the silence
as the horizon begins to appear.
So much precedes

the moment of change,
everything drawn
to encounter

where the road bends
and the church stands
and the bell tower leans

where the cows gather
and a woman and child wait
for a bus that finally comes

where the bench is lined with umbrella-ed talk
that hushes when the bread truck arrives,
unfolding its crusted aromas and awning

where the young men smoke and caucus
on the stoop of the pub
and a bicycle rolls by, balancing milk cans

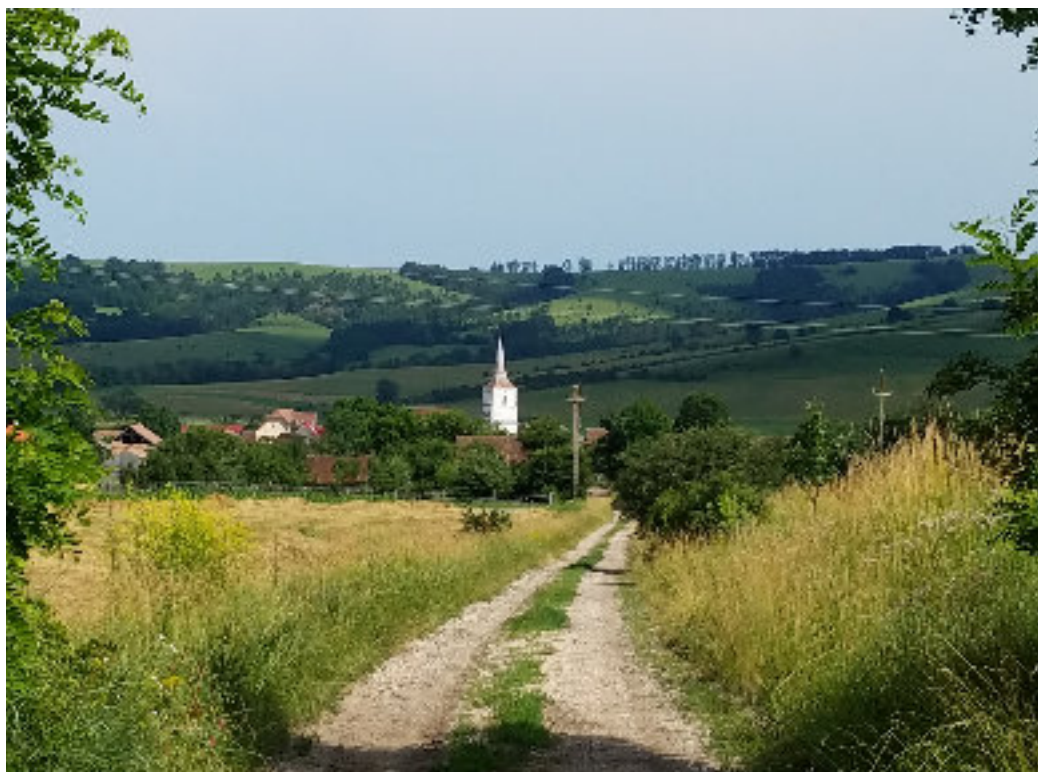
where the women sweep the walk
to the church on Sundays
and every day the bell in the tower

rings, marking three hours—
dawn, noon, and nightfall—the time
in between singing like a river

where the road bends
and all of us are drawn to encounter:
Hungarians and Americans, too

in the waiting and the ringing
and the sweeping and unfolding
and the singing and the clacking

as the tables are set and cleared,
and the horizon comes and goes,
and all too soon we part as friends.



Homoród Valley

Barbara Hubbard



Church Doors

Barbara Hubbard