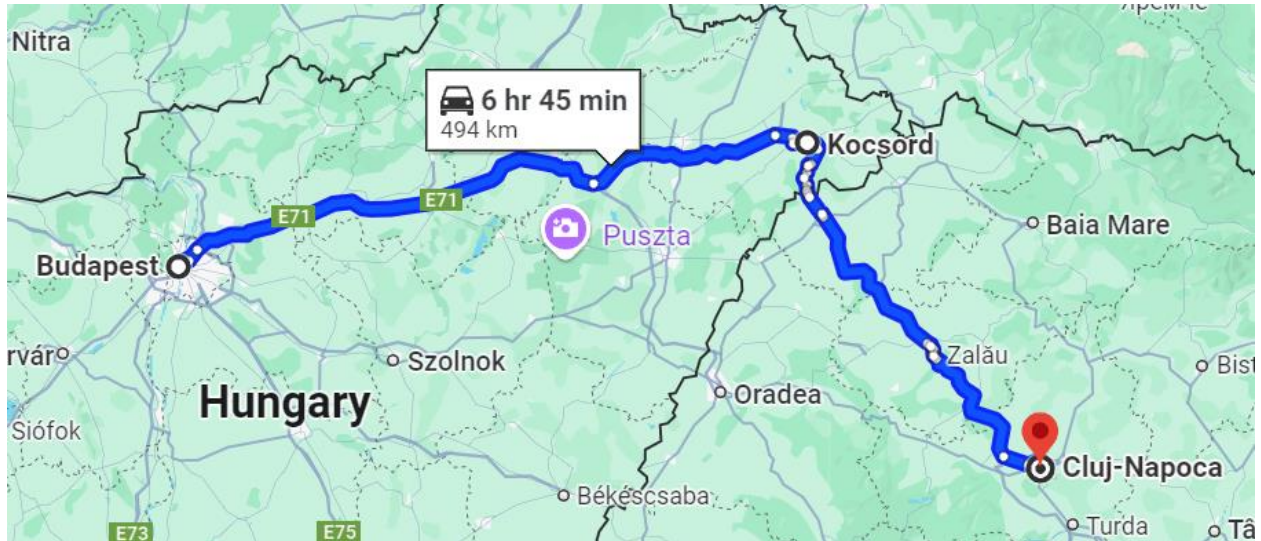


Here is a brief description of my trip to Transylvania September 2024 with some photos.

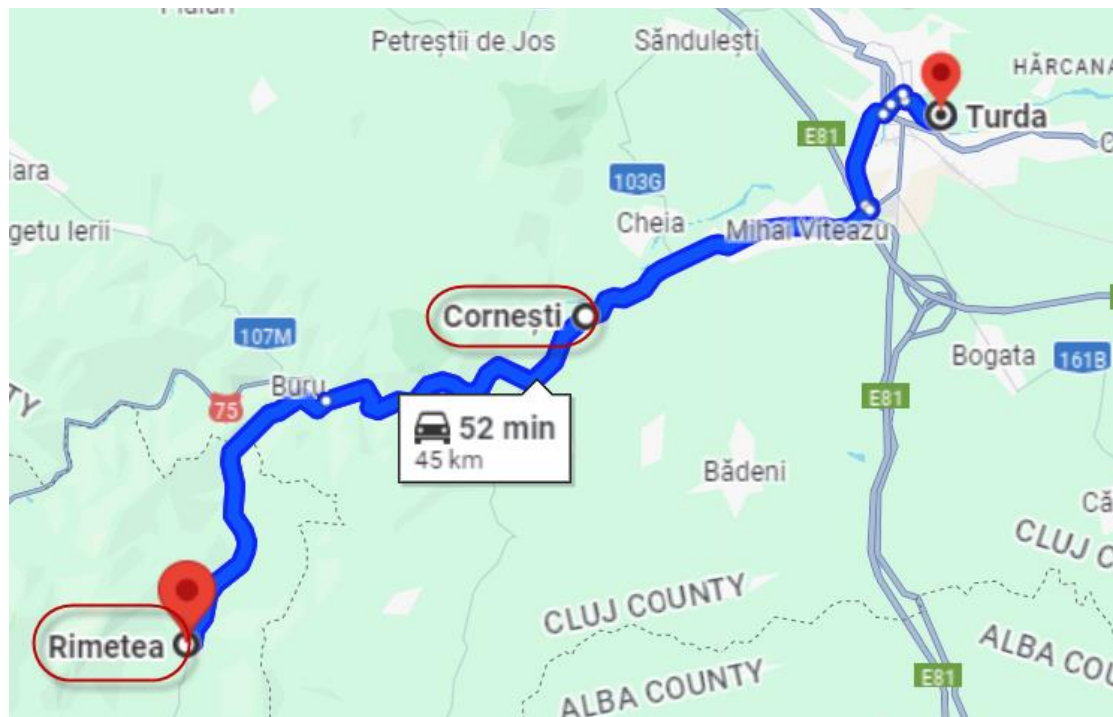
I got to Budapest on Sunday 8/31. On Tuesday 9/3 I picked up Alison Balogh at Budapest airport. She is an American woman living in Athens and I had agreed to take her to Kolozsvar for the ICUUW meeting. On the way after a 3 hour drive we spent the night in Kocsord with Rev. Zsuzsanna Bartha.



On Wednesday we arrived in Kolozsvár. My room was in Guesthouse 1568, at the House of Religious Freedom, run by the Unitarian Church.

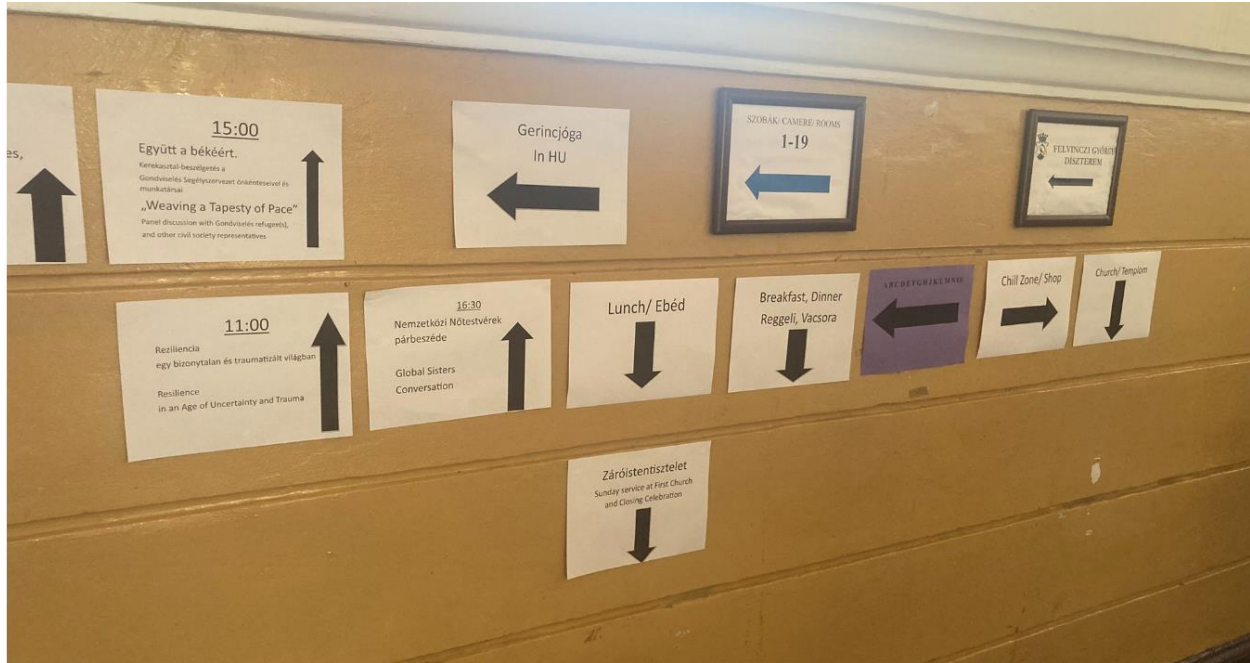
<https://guesthouse1568.ro/en/guest-house-1568accommodation-cluj-napoca-romania/>

I went to Sinfalva on Thursday morning, with Alison. We met Rev. Palfi and his wife Ildiko and we also went to Torocko (Rimetea) about 15 miles away which is a Unitarian village which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Sinfalva is in a great location a/2 between Torocko and Torda.





Thursday afternoon the ICUUW Convocation 2024 started with a tour of the House of Religious Freedom. Then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday there was a pretty full program of events: ceremonies, talks, panel sessions, worship services, and meals of course. The events all took place in the large Unitarian church or the Unitarian high school next door. I won't go into the events in detail, but here is a photo of the schedules posted on the walls.



One event I would like to describe in particular, though, was the Chalice Lighters groups. Every participant was assigned a group which would meet three times, once each day, with the same people each time. The idea was to have an intimate space to discuss the experiences, learn from and bond with each other, etc. Well, a couple of months ago I was asked to lead the “Men’s Chalice Lighters” group. There were enough men to form a group, and I agreed. Friday evening we met for the first time, Bruce Knotts was there (very involved with UU UN Office, has been at MUUF multiple times), some other men who were accompanying their wives, and who should walk in but the Unitarian Bishop, the guy who has responsibility for 300 – 350 village churches. He said that since he was a man, he had been assigned to this group, and here he was. His name is Istvan Kovacs but he introduced himself as “Steve Smith” with a big smile. I assumed he was making a courtesy visit and he would bow out after a few minutes, but no, he stayed with us for the entire session and the next one and the third one too.

It was a great honor and privilege to interact intimately with such a cultured, educated, thoughtful person. He didn’t just pontificate, but joined in the conversation with a lot of give and take. I now consider him a friend and I’ll be communicating with him in the coming year or two as Rev Palfi retires and his replacement is named, making sure that the replacement is aware of our relationship and hopefully wants to continue and grow it.

Another outstandingly memorable event was the concert given by Ukrainian women refugees in the Unitarian church. There is a Unitarian refugee support group called Gondviselés (Providence) which has had a big impact on many peoples’ lives. One of the women was actually a preprofessional singer in Ukraine and was hired by the Kolozsvár opera. I’ve got some short video clips I will post on the PCC web page. It was very moving.



The ICUUW Convo finished Sunday around 2:00 after a final dinner, and I drove to Sinfalva again. On the way I dropped Alison off at the Torda Salt Mine which is now a quasi-theme park, underground.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salina_Turda

The timing worked out perfectly so that the MUUF Ingathering service which started at 10:00AM was 5:00 PM in Sinfalva. I was able to show the YouTube livestream on my laptop to about 10 people in Ildiko and Denes' kitchen. You can actually just make out Sasha on my laptop.



I had many interesting experiences after that, driving back to Budapest, staying in Berettyoujfalú with Alison for three days, etc. but that's not relevant to Partner Church.