

Announcing Elizabeth Norton: 2019 Recipient of the Cornish “Living the Mission” Award

*By Rev. Roger Bertschausen,
UUPCC Executive Director*

The UUPCC’s Board of Directors is honored and pleased to announce that it has chosen **Elizabeth (Beth) Henderson Norton** as the recipient of the 2019 Louis C. Cornish “Living the Mission” Award. The award is given annually to honor a person who has worked tirelessly to foster the mission of developing and sustaining mutually beneficial congregational partnerships between Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists around the world. The award will be joyously presented to Beth at the UUPCC’s Annual Meeting at the 2019 General Assembly (GA) in Spokane.



This award coincides with the celebration this year of Beth’s 25th anniversary as Music Director at First Parish in Concord, MA. The award is recognition not only of Beth’s dedicated work on behalf of First Parish’s longstanding and vibrant partnership with the Unitarian church in Székelykeresztúr, Transylvania, but also Beth’s leadership in making music a focal point of the wider partnership movement. It is very fitting that the first professional musician to win the Cornish Award is Beth Norton. This award celebrates not just Beth but also the rich and wonderful gift music has been in strengthening partnerships.



Beth and the First Parish Choir in a 2007 concert in Transylvania.

Beth first became involved in partnership when she worked with a committee to plan a Concord choir pilgrimage to Transylvania in 2002. The pilgrimage with 42 travelers was a real turning point in the relationship between the two congregations: many more First Parish people got involved in partnership, and it was the beginning of many true and long-lasting friendships between members of both congregations.

In preparation for that trip, Beth arranged for a series of Hungarian language classes that was offered to the travelers. Beth herself became a serious student of

Hungarian and has become fairly proficient in the basics of the language. The choir learned many songs in Hungarian.

Before embarking on the pilgrimage, Beth wrote a lovely hymn for the choir to take along with it. She set the words of Székely Áldás (a blessing) to music, putting the original Hungarian and the English translation into beautiful, intertwining harmonies. This hymn was later included in the hymnal supplement, *Singing the Journey*, published in 2005. Hymn #1043 has become *the* anthem of US/Canadian partnerships with Transylvania. I travel around the continent visiting congregations, and “Székely Áldás” is almost always one of the hymns chosen for the service.

Beth led additional First Parish choir pilgrimages in 2007, 2010, and 2014. The most recent pilgrimage she helped lead was in 2018. It was a multigenerational “Family Pilgrimage.” Beth helped plan the pilgrimage, taught Hungarian songs to the pilgrims, facilitated the development of the pilgrims’ Hopes and Norms, and helped lead frequent check-ins during the pilgrimage.



Playing the organ in Mézskö.

During the 2018 pilgrimage, the Berde Mózes Hungarian Unitarian High School’s Vadrózsák Néptánccsoport (Wild Roses Folk Dance Group) did a performance for the Concord group. Hearing the group’s desire to perform in the United States, Beth immediately realized the importance of this and committed her time and energy to making that a reality.



Beth sharing in music with Zékelykeresztúr’s minister Rev. Tódor Csaba and his wife Éva.

This fall, 25 student dancers and musicians, coaches, and chaperones will come and do a New England tour. It will be a dream come true for the dance group and for their Concord hosts. Beth gets things done!

Beyond “Székely Áldás, Beth has had a significant impact on the larger Partnership world. Most notably, in 2011 and again in 2013, she led 2 large UUPCC choral tours in Transylvania that included singers from all across the United States, as well as some from Transylvania. It’s no surprise that

the UUPCC turned to Beth when the idea of a larger UUPCC choral trip arose. Many times over the last 2 decades, Beth has organized and beautifully led the music for the international worship services presented by the UUPCC at various GAs.

The UUPCC congratulates Beth Norton. We are deeply grateful for her gift of music and the gift music is in Partnership!



**Combined Concord and Keresztúr choirs in 2010 pilgrimage
(Beth is on the left of the seated row)**