

First Unitarian Pittsburgh Khasi Hills Partnership

2018-19 Initiative: Sponsor-A-Teacher

By Karen Litzinger, First Unitarian Pittsburgh



AMBCV school celebrates its 50th anniversary!

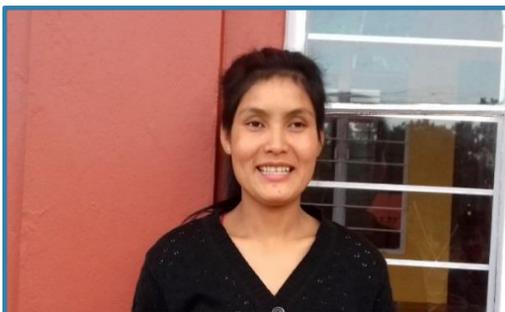
First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh has been supporting the Annie Margaret Barr Secondary School in Kharang in the Khasi Hills of India since 2003 and most recently the new Higher Secondary School. We were so happy that Lois Hurt could represent our church as the honored guest at the opening ceremony of the Jubilee Celebration!

What nice timing that we reached a record-setting goal of supporting the two new teachers for our school with a salary of \$4,800 each for the entire year. Our goal has been to support the two additional

teachers that were needed following the inauguration of our new Higher Secondary School in June 2016. Prior to that, we helped with the construction.

All 14 of our first 12th grade class passed their graduation exam!

This school enables students to complete high school locally rather than traveling to the state capital. The 2 young women pictured below received perfect scores on their graduation exams. Both were accepted to the National Skills Trainers' Institute for Women. Phlinsimai (*below left*) is studying Fashion Technology and Badashisha (*below right*) is studying Cosmetology.



The 100% pass rate will help our new Higher Secondary School to be accredited. That is when government funding of teachers should become available. We are the seed money for the expansion. The pressing need is to continue teacher funding until accreditation. It's amazing how a little money goes a long way.

About Khasi Hills: In far northeast India, beneath Bhutan and above Bangladesh, lies the state of Meghalaya. Unitarians have lived in the small cities of Jowai and Shillong and in the many very small outlying villages of the Khasi and Jaintia hills since the founding of the first Unitarian church in 1897 by a Khasi man, Hajom Kissor Singh. There are now 45 congregations and about 10,000 adults and children in this very poor and rural area. It is the second largest population of Unitarians in the world. Beginning

in the 1970s, largely inspired by the life of British Unitarian minister Annie Margaret Barr, the Unitarians began to found and manage schools in small villages inhabited by tribal Khasi people. There are now 34 Unitarian schools, and they are open to all children.

A brief history of our church involvement: Our involvement with Khasi Hills began initially through the Religious Education program when Katie Horowitz was selected as one of two youth representatives from the United States to travel to Khasi Hills around 1999. After that, we began a cultural exchange program between our Sunday School and the Sunday School of the Jowai church, the largest Unitarian church in the region. We participated in the Kharang Sponsor-A-Student program from 2003 through 2012 and then funded minor capital improvements.



Photographs of minor capital improvements we've funded, such as a fence to keep goats out of science projects (left) and a media screen (right).

Jen Halperin and Ebe Emmons-Apt visited Khasi Hills in 2005, including the Unitarian church in Jowai and the Annie Margaret Barr Secondary School in Kharang, our partner school. Each visited a second time. Catie Scudera, a Carnegie Mellon student and member of our campus ministry program, cofounded and built an orphanage in 2008-2009, which continues to house approximately 20 children from the Unitarian community. John Williams assisted with this project in the fall of 2008. Reverend Herndon visited in 2012 as part of his sabbatical, and Karen Litzinger visited in March 2015. We have also had visits to Pittsburgh from Indian leaders of the Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI), including Darihun Khriam and Nangroi Suting, both of whom had internships with the UUA International Office. Barri Mukhim from the Management Committee of our school visited in June 2016. Most recently Lois Hurt visited in March 2018.

UUPCC and travel opportunities: For 20 years the UUPCC has encouraged and supported almost 200 congregational partnerships between American and Canadian Unitarian Universalists and Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists around the world. Find more information at www.uupcc.org.

Khublei! (*Khasi greeting with multiple uses & meanings, primarily "God bless you"*)
