

RE Curriculum

Who Are Our Partners Around the World?

LESSON #1: Partners Around the World

GOALS:

- To explore what partnership is.
- To learn the history of partnerships between Unitarian Universalist churches around the world.
- To prepare for learning about our partners around the world today.

MATERIALS:

1. Large wall map of the world.
2. Pushpins and string or yarn.
3. Old suitcase filled with supplies. (To be left in the class for use in all lessons.)
4. Partners Passports, one for each participant (plus extras for those who may come to later lessons).
5. Directions for folding passports.
6. Scissors, tape
7. Optional:
 - Camera for taking pictures for passports (Poloroid-type cameras, or recruit someone with a digital camera and color printer; make arrangements for adding participants in later weeks.)
 - If you choose to play Blindfold Soccer, you will need soccer balls or other small kick balls, one for every two participants.

INTRODUCTION (10 min.)

Gather in a circle. Begin discussion by finding out what the group knows about the Partner Church Council and your partner church. "How many of you know that we have a partner church in _____(country or region)? What do you think it means that this is our 'partner church'?"
Discuss.

Today we're going to begin a program that will last _____weeks. We're going to learn more about who are partners are, in _____(your partner's country) as well as 5 other regions of the world where there are Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists congregations.

But first we're going to spend some time thinking about what partnership means and how it came to be that UUs have partner churches around the world.

PARTNERSHIP GAMES (20-30 min.)

Lots of games are played with opponents: one team playing another against another team, or one person playing against another person. Go around the circle naming some of your favorite competitive games.

Say: "Think about the game you just named: Can you think of a way to change that game so it is played with partners instead of opponents?" (For example: kickball could be played to see how high a total score the two teams could get in a certain number of innings.) How would it change the game? Would it make the game more fun? Less fun? What would be hard about it?"

Discuss what makes playing partners fun and what makes playing partners hard sometimes.

Depending on the size and age of your group, choose one of the following games to play. Each of these games can only be played with partners:

Mirror Work

Form Partners; one pretends to see himself/herself in the mirror. The follower, who is being the reflection in the mirror, should try to match exactly these movements, remembering that the leader's right side is the follower's left. The movements can include gestures, facial expressions and body movements. Switch roles. (Note: the leader and the follower are trying to help each other be as much the same as possible, the way a mirror would reflect exactly how you were moving.)

Pair Poses

Form partners: One person arranges the other in a certain stance and posture. The person in the posture then figures out a logical reason for being in a pose like that and follows through with a motion. For example, if you are crouched with your right hand extended you could pantomime petting a cat or roasting a hot dog over a campfire. Switch jobs.

I Need Help

Divide into partners; decide on a task that takes two people to do, such as moving a heavy piece of furniture. Take a few minutes to figure out the task and figure out how you will do it. Then pantomime performing the task for the whole group, being as precise as you can. If you use imaginary objects, make sure to establish their shapes and keep them the same throughout. Let your group guess what you are doing.

Blindfold Soccer (for ages 9 and up)

Equipment: blindfolds, slightly deflated balls or foam balls, goals or cone markers.

Have the class divide into pairs. Have one of the partners put on a blindfold. Let the sighted leader try leading by attempting to verbally guide his/her partner to the opposite end of the room while kicking a ball. Change roles. Be sure to use good safety and stay close to your blindfolded partner. Rules: 1) Only the blindfolded player can make contact with the ball. The sighted member can only offer verbal directions. 2) There is to be no contact with any other players. 3) DO NOT allow high kicks. 4) Heavy boots are not allowed. 5) Limit running with the blindfolded player. Modify and make an obstacle course to follow.

Reflection

Discuss what it was like to play your chosen game. What made it fun? What made it hard? Some things to talk about are: what did you partner do that made it fun and easy? What did she/he do that made it hard? What responsibilities did you have to your partner?

Snack and Story (10 min.)

Tell the story of the Sister Church Program in Transylvania while the kids have a snack prepared by the PCC Committee.

Prepare for the next lesson(s) (15 min)

Direct the group's attention to the map of the world. Locate the 6 different regions of the world where UU partnerships exist today: Transylvania (Romania and Hungary), Philippines, Khasi Hills (India), Czech Republic, Britain, North America. Put a pushpin in the region and a pushpin on your location in the US. (In later lessons, you will connect the pushpins with string to the place you studying that day.)

Ask if any of the participants already have a connection with one of these areas. As if one or more of the participants would be willing to look up the time differences between home and these places on the internet and bring in the answers next week.

Give each participant a *Partners Passport* handout. Follow instructions to fold, cut and re-fold to make into a small booklet. Take photos to stick into passports, or ask kids to bring one in for the next lesson.

[Note: The passports will document the owner's "travels" to visit different Unitarian Universalist groups in other areas of the world. After visiting a country, they get a logo sticker for that country and the date stamped or written on the Unitarian or Unitarian Universalist group's page in their passport. The passports should all be kept in the Partnership suitcase and taken out at the start of each "traveling" lesson.]

THE STORY OF UU PARTNERS

Some of you have heard the story of King Sigismund, the Unitarian king of Transylvania, and of his mother, Queen Isabella, who gave a great idea to her son and to the people of Transylvania: That faith is a gift of God and no one should be punished on account of it.

In those old days, most kings and queens made laws that said everyone in the kingdom had to have the same religion as the king and queen. Often people who tried to choose a different religion would be punished, put in jail, or even killed. Queen Isabella and her son King Sigismund thought it was better for people to decide for themselves what religion they wanted, and for people not be fight with each other about religion.

(Have any of you ever seen or heard of people fighting about religion?)

After King Sigismund died, a new king tried to change the law of Transylvania. He wanted everyone in his kingdom to be Catholic. But the people didn't like that law, and finally the king agreed to allow a little bit of freedom. "People can go to whatever kind of church they like" said the king, "But the ministers can only teach the things I say they can, and I will not allow any new ideas about religion." Unitarians have always been free-thinkers—so this was very hard for them.

Hundreds of years went by, and then people in other places began to have Unitarian ideas. Maybe you know what some of those might be:

- there is one God,
- the one God is bigger than anyone can understand.
- just because people have different ideas about God, doesn't mean there are different Gods. And it doesn't mean that some people are right and others are wrong, because no one can know everything about God.
- Jesus isn't God, he was a wise teacher who loved God.
- Maybe God is happy that people have different ideas, because God created us to have minds that are curious and ask and think.

The Unitarian religion began to grow in places like England and America, where freedom of religion was allowed. The Unitarians in England and America could easily share ideas with each other, because they spoke the same language. But they didn't know that there were Unitarians in Transylvania and in Hungary. And the Unitarians in Transylvania and Hungary didn't know there were any other Unitarians anywhere, until – people began to travel. A little while after 1830, a Hungarian Unitarian, visited America and discovered Unitarian churches there. In spite of the different languages, friendships began to grow.

In the early 1900's there was a great war between the countries in Europe, which soon spread to many other places in the world. When the war was over, the land of Transylvania, which had always been a Hungarian –speaking country, was given to Romania. Things were very hard for the Transylvanians then and the American Unitarians decided to try to help. The Unitarians in American and in Transylvania came up with an idea for joining churches together as "partner" or "sister" churches. In this way, the American Unitarians learned about something that made the Unitarians in Transylvania very sad. During the war, the army had taken away many of their church bells, melted them and turned them into cannons. So American Unitarians sent money to Transylvania, for new bells.

The sister church plan didn't last very long. In America there were big problems with the economy. Lots of people didn't have jobs, and people who once had been rich were suddenly poor. During that time many Unitarian churches closed. Because the sister church program started with Americans wanting to

send money to help Transylvanians, when there was no more money to send, American Unitarians stopped talking about, and stopped thinking about, their Sister Churches. (Sometimes people think the only way you can help someone is to give them money. What do you think?)

Meanwhile, a new government took over in Romania, one that took away many freedoms. The new government leader made laws saying that all religions were bad. People should only listen to, and believe in, the leader of the government.

Ministers were allowed to preach and teach in their churches, but only if they said what the leader of the government wanted them to say. There was no free-thinking, and no free speech allowed. Ministers who spoke up about what they really believed were often sent to jail. People who were very old could go to church if they wanted to. But people who had jobs could not, and their children were not allowed to go to church either. Religious education and youth groups were against the law.

And it was also against the law for any Romanian to go to another country, or to write letters to or get letters from friends or relatives in other countries. As this happened when the American Unitarians were worried about their own problems, the sister church connections died.

Still, a few Unitarians in America and a few in Transylvanian Romania, continued to remember each other. In 1989, the Romanian dictatorship fell and freedom began to come back to Romania. Almost immediately, the leaders of the American Unitarian Universalists arranged a visit to the new leaders of Romania. Soon there was talk about starting up new Sister Church connections again. But this time, things were different. American UU's and Transylvanian Unitarians realized it is important to learn from past mistakes. We decided that our new connections could not be about Americans sending money to "save Transylvania." Instead, it was agreed that we could learn to be partners and friends, and that it is important to build strong connections of friendship first, and then see if there are things we want to do together. If we need money to pay for these things, we can think together about how to find the money.

Soon after that, American Unitarian Universalists grew interested in meeting other Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists in other places. We believe that it is good when people all over the world are be partners, working together, playing together, understanding and caring about each other. This is why, in our Sunday School, we will find out together, WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS AROUND THE WORLD.

* Teacher Background, and/or discussion with older children.

Here are a few other things that were against the law during the Communist dictatorship:

It was against the law for people to own their own house or land. People were not even allowed to on the crops they grew or the milk given by the cows they took care of. The government decided what kind of food, and how much of it, you could have. The government decided what school a child would go to and whether a child would be taught to be a factory worker or a teacher, a musician or an athlete or a farmer. The government told you where you would live, and what work you could do. No one could decide for themselves.

Speaking Hungarian was not allowed. People could not even give their children Hungarian names. A child with an unlawful name would not be allowed to go to school, and might even be taken away from his or her parents and sent to an orphanage. People could not decide for themselves how many children to have. The leader wanted to have more Romanians and fewer Hungarians in Transylvania, so all Romanian women who were married had to have 5 children, even if they could not afford to take care of so many. In those days many children were abandoned and sent to live in orphanages.