

*A Discussion Guide for:*

# *Most Like An Arch*

*Building Global Church Partnerships*

*by David Keyes*

*Most Like An Arch* has the distinction of being a book that arrived exactly when it was most wanted. While some Unitarian Universalist congregations have long and varied histories of international engagement, the Partner Church movement which began in the late 1980's and grew throughout the following decade, created the current wide-spread need for a practical, cogent, and theologically-grounded primer on the many blessings – and complexities – of faithful international engagement. David Keyes addressed that need in his Minn's Lectures in 1996-7 and their subsequent collection and publication in *Most Like An Arch*.

Ten years after publication David will undoubtedly say that his book is in need of updating. Yet, I'm convinced that it stands as the essential textbook for every UU congregation that seeks to be effectively internationally engaged. My hope is that this discussion guide will invite more people to consider the wisdom, the challenges and the hope he offers. That would be such a blessing for our liberal religious movement.

*This Discussion Guide is suitable for use by large groups, small groups, and even by individuals. It could provide the basis of a congregational multi-session study of faithful global partnership, or material for short and tightly-focused reflection periods at the beginning or end of partner church committee meetings. For additional assistance, please contact the UUA's International Resources Office*

*Rev. Eric M. Cherry  
Director of International Resources, UUA*

## **I. The Introduction:**

“Most like an arch – two weaknesses that lean into a strength. Two fallings become firm. Two joined abeyances become a term Naming the fact that teaches fact to mean.”

- John Ciardi (p. 17)

- What is the meaning of the word “mission” – both traditionally and according to Loren Mead?
- What did the Congregational Church in Needham do? Why did it matter?
- What are the 8 markers of a “transformed” church that effective international partnership addresses?
- What, according to the “Sister Parish Program” promotes quality in an international partnership?

## **II. The Collection for Jerusalem: Money, Power and Paternalism in Partner Church Programs**

2 Corinthians 8:13-15: “... *it is a question of fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written: The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.*” (p. 37)

- What was the original meaning of *Koinonia*, and what is its relationship to equality and balance?
- Is money the “root of much evil” in international partnership or not?

- Why did David Dennison change his mind about church-to-church partnerships and the role of money within them?
- What is the institutional difference between a “missionary program” and an international church partnership program? What are the benefits/challenges of either?
- Is sustaining an international partnership a reasonable expectation of some or all UU congregations?
- Why is it important that North American congregations understand their obligation to receive spiritual gifts through partnership?

### **III. Most Like An Arch: The Meeting Places of American and Transylvanian Unitarianism**

*“It is surely no coincidence that an intense period of exchange among world Unitarian churches occurred at almost the same time Channing delivered his Baltimore sermon... Indeed, it seems likely that [a circa 1820] Transylvanian account inspired the creation of what we know today as Unitarian denominationalism. Such a contribution should be acknowledged as of tremendous importance and so carefully documented. (p. 63)*

- What are the two streams of thought regarding the origins of American Unitarianism that Keyes identifies?
- Who was Reverend William Hazlitt, and what influence did he have on the development of American Unitarianism.
- Were the Unitarians and Socinians of Eastern Europe similar or distinct?
- What is the difference between the “independent” and “non-independent” streams of thought regarding the origination of American Unitarianism? What do the “after glow of the Enlightenment” and the “Radical Reformation” have to do with either stream of thought?

- What role did János Kriza have in the interchange between American and Transylvanian Unitarians? And, György Enyedi?
- Why does it matter whether East European Unitarianism and/or Socinianism influenced American Unitarianism at a formative moment? And, why does it matter whether Transylvanian Unitarians were influenced by American Unitarians?
- Were there Unitarians on the *Mayflower*?

#### **IV. Global Partnership and the Local Congregation**

*“Father Carl is unabashedly critical of American denominations he sees at work trying to change the Russian religious landscape. ‘It’s presumptuous,’ he says. ‘When these people have a depth of faith that surpasses ours, it’s like saying, “let’s take Judaism to Israel.’” (p. 81)*

- How can a faithful international partnership help a church to grow maturationally, organizationally and incarnationally?
- What can American UU congregations learn from the Flint River Presbytery’s early attempts to build international partnerships?
- How do you respond to Father Carl’s candid statement about his church’s international partnership, that “Sometimes it seems like the only thing we have to give is money, and they come here and radiate the power of God.” (p. 80)

- What have been the key moments in the Abasfalva/Bedford partnership?
- What can be done about disagreements and cultural differences that are encountered in international partnership?
- What do the excerpts by Tillich, Weil, and Loomer share? (p. 91-2) How are they related to Buber's comment that "All real living is meeting."?

## **V. Money and Power in One Denominations Partnerships**

*"Now please understand that I could have devoted this entire lecture series to what could stand improvement in the Unitarian Church in Romania and Hungary. I am, at first hand and in depth, aware of the shortcomings there. They have very human institutions that have suffered four hundred plus years of oppression, including forty recent years of fine-tuned, state-sponsored psychological terrorism. But what I have discovered is that every time I undertake criticism of Unitarians in Transylvania, I am able to see a reflection and magnification of the flaw in my own country."*(p. 106)

- Discuss your reactions to the three lessons about "Money and Power" that Keyes describes learning from traditional denominational mission leaders?
- How has the UU Partner Church movement measured up to these lessons?
- How can the UUA best assist the international partner church movement?
- What is the "Sin of Uniquity," and how does it impact international partnerships?

## **VI. Future Gifts of Mission and Covenant**

Amos 3:3 (KJV) – *Can two walk together except they be agreed?*

Amos 3:3 (NRSV) – *Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?*

*“So let’s make an appointment. If that is what it takes to keep two walking together, then let’s do it. What would be involved? I see the appointment process in two dimensions. One is covenantal and, therefore perhaps, spiritual. The other dimension is organizational.” (p.116)*

- What is a covenant? What role does it serve for a congregation, and what role can it serve for an international partnership?
- What are the aspects of international partnership that a covenant should address?
- What was so magical about the Presbyterian/RCC partnership that Keyes describes? What makes that kind of “magic” possible in an international partnership?

## **Appendix A - Project Harvest Hope: Micro Enterprise for Transylvanian Villages**

- What is the mission of Project Harvest Hope?
- How are some of the potential “pitfalls” of international partnership that Keyes describes avoided by Project Harvest Hope?
- What are the recent activities of Project Harvest Hope, 10 years after the publication of *Most Like An Arch*?

## **Appendix B - Principles for Partnership: Reflections from a Pilgrimage**

- What is the importance of “falling in love” and setting out to develop relationships of mutuality in international partnership? What does developing mutuality mean?
- What are the most important effects of international partnership?
- How do Keyes’ “Principles of Partnership” offer guidance against the “Sin of Uniquity”?

**About the Author:**

(from *Most Like An Arch*)

David Keyes is Founding President of Project Harvest Hope, a non-profit organization working since 1996 to support sustainable agriculture and community development in the Unitarian heartlands of Transylvania. He has served as president of the UU Partner Church Council, and is a UUA accredited interim minister.



*The Faith Without Borders program is designed to assist congregations in creating and sustaining effective international engagement ministries through resources, consultation and celebration.*

For more information, please contact [the International Resources Office](#) at the Unitarian Universalist Association or visit us on the web at [uua.org/international](http://uua.org/international).