

# **450 Years of Unitarianism**

## **1568-2018**

In 2018 the Hungarian Unitarian Church will celebrate its establishment 450 years ago. To mark this momentous occasion there will be festivities on both the national and local levels throughout the year. The commemorations will center on those fundamental values on which our Church was founded and which have shaped its history.

### **I. International Conference on Religious Tolerance - January 12<sup>th</sup>**

*„In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt...” (John 14,2)*

#### **Religious tolerance - End or Beginning?**

Europe and other regions of the world came a long way these last centuries in acknowledging religious tolerance. This tolerance encompasses manifold levels and relationships: states and churches, great religions, or restraining the circle Christian denominations between themselves as well as currents within the same church. Today religious tolerance is considered a given. The state guarantees it, the rationality of our existence enforces it, and our religious feelings enhance it. We proclaim it as an attainment; we consider it natural and the end of the road. But is it so?

The events of these last years in Europe demonstrate the precariousness of this status quo. It seems that we live under the false impression of an answer and solution presumably accepted by all, and presumably considered definite.

Is religious tolerance as a final attainment – as we believers and institutions live it - a viable solution or an obstacle in the way of true tolerance, true coexistence? Is tolerance understood as the basis of knowledge, understanding and perhaps even dialogue? Is tolerance understood as an openness of the individual, and the institutions, with the understanding that Transcendence cannot be encompassed?

Could religious tolerance be reformulated as a beginning and can this help in overcoming the spiritual crisis of our time, in starting a collaborative effort of churches and religions to help solve the political and social challenges of contemporary society?

The International Conference aims to map the implications of religious tolerance for contemporary society and to reframe it in such a way to help individuals and religious institutions move toward a more open and cooperative approach.

### **II. Dedication of the Center for Religious Freedom**

*„...ubi autem Spiritus Domini ibi libertas.” (2Cor 3,17)*

The founding of the Unitarian Church in Transylvania is closely linked to the proclamation of the law of Religious Freedom and Tolerance issued at the Diet of Torda, on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1568. Bishop Francis David and King John Sigismund played a significant role in the ratification of the law that allowed for the first time the right for religious freedom and conscience and also the right of the congregations to elect their own preachers. Because of this law, Transylvania became a land of religious freedom and

denominational tolerance, providing shelter for people charged with heresy in other less tolerant European countries.

To commemorate this momentous event in the history of the Hungarian Unitarian Church, a project of outstanding importance was undertaken. The former residence of the Unitarian bishops, one of the remaining medieval buildings in Kolozsvár, is being renovated and transformed to serve the purposes of the larger community. The building will be committed as Center for Religious Freedom and will house a community area, a research center for religious studies and a museum.

The Center for Religious Freedom will be dedicated to the service of the community and the ideal of religious freedom and tolerance. The dedication of the Center will take place on **July 7<sup>th</sup> 2018** as part of the celebrations of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unitarian Church.

### **III. Anniversary Assembly of the Synod – Thanksgiving and Hope**

*„Dominus illuminatio mea...” (Ps 27,1)*

The Hungarian Unitarian Church considers the Declaration of Religious Freedom and tolerance at the Diet of Torda in 1568 as its founding document. During these 450 years, the supreme legislative and governing body of the Church was the Synod, formed by clerics and laity alike. Throughout its existence, the Synod left its undeniable imprint on the history of the denomination. Its decisions clarified and reformed the teachings of the Church, and its stance determined traditions and spiritual values.

On the **8<sup>th</sup> of December** the Synod of the Hungarian Unitarian Church will hold an Anniversary Assembly to give thanks and to look forward. The Assembly will give thanks to God, our Lord for His providence, for the wisdom of our elected officials and for the faith and staunchness of the congregants. The Synod will acknowledge the enlightenment which overcame religious disputes and conflicts and will bear witness to the willingness of peace and understanding between denominations.

The Synod will testify with the Psalmist that the Lord is our Light. This heavenly light, which guided our forebearers, is reflected in our lives, and helps us to find the way toward each other, to know and to respect diversity, to keep our traditions and to work for ways of renewal.