

Delegates, Hosts, Guests, and internationally-minded Unitarians and Universalists – U\*U friends now here in the cradle of our organized existence:

First a report on the complex visa situation: You will all be aware that we have had four participants (one of them self-funded) whose visas to enter Romania were denied [three Kenyans, Alice Magara, Josphat Mainye, Jared Nchore; and Sri Lankan Walter Jayewardine]. There were many other cases where delays while “extra documentation” not listed in original requirements has been requested. Yesterday I heard that the Nigerian delegation was once more asked to call back the next day for news about approval; Dávid Gyerő has heard from the central Romanian authorities that they approved the visas three weeks ago, but the local Embassy has now delayed the issue to the point where none of the Nigerians will be coming. I mention here the Matimoju brothers, Femi and Adeyinka and there were two more self-funding applicants. There was one case [Alain Yengué of Congo Brazzaville] where a neighbouring African country did not approve a visa to travel to the nearest Romanian Embassy. Along with three cases where the failure is more attributable to the applicants and one guest who abandoned his application because of potential refusal, this represents a significant impact on our guest list. I would point out the untiring efforts of Dávid Gyerő on behalf of our guests, even when he was on holiday and main communication was by mobile phone. Thank you, Dávid.

Almost every Council Meeting since 1993, including the founding meeting in the USA, Polly Guild informs me, had at least one visa denied. Similar stories have affected invited guests at ICUU Member's national gatherings. It is not just Romania, but U\*U gatherings in the USA, Canada, and Germany in the last two years that have reported visa refusals -- there may be others. Some years ago I myself mistakenly applied for an event visa rather than a tourist visa to attend the Annual Meetings of the Unitarian Union of NE India, causing the hosts extra headaches and causing me to miss the meetings because my visa was only granted the day after

the last possible flight to get there for the start. My story, however, had a happy ending: 12 months later Barbara and I married and went to India, including the Khasi Hills, for our honeymoon. We went on tourist visas and attended the Unitarian Union Meetings without problems.

The visa issue will definitely move up the list of factors to be considered by the Executive in choosing the next Council venue, but please understand that it was known that there might be some problems when the decision was made, we just could not have predicted the size of the problem we were hit with. As we reach out to more U\*U groups in Asia and Africa this consideration is likely to grow, not to shrink.

Our President has given a very full report of the activities during the past two years and also given strong pointers to the hopes and plans for the future that Council members are being consulted about. That doesn't leave me much to talk about – but,,, before I sit down, I share some brief observations over the past four years based on my view of myself as a transition person:

And “transition” is the word that feeds most of the following observations.

We are moving to an enhanced staff model – in stages, but with a clear goal to a significantly larger capacity. My key observation here, and a message that I've delivered many times to the Executive, is that this requires attention and commitment to ICUU's CORE budget. It is relatively easy to raise funds for projects, (these are, in the jargon, “sexy” in attracting money) from outsiders and from members; there may even come a time when ICUU rejects money offered for projects we deem unsuitable to our purposes or capacity. But CORE funding is notoriously difficult to achieve in the charity sector of any economy. And it is US, our Member Groups and our individual U\*U people that have to help us bridge the gap between our hopes and our abilities.

We have a model of one Memorandum of Understanding between our ICUU collective and an individual Member Group. As we adapt and adopt this Memorandum model with other individual Member Groups, please remember that one of the responsibilities of a Member Group is to make the goals, and visions, and needs of ICUU known to its individual members. We do not want to become a semi-secret elitist collection of U\*U world tourists. To be an international community we need links fostered by National leadership.

Partner Churches are one important aspect of this and the Partner Church Council has had valuable experience of the distortions caused to partnerships by very different economic levels – perhaps ICUU should be pushing for partnerships between economically similar communities to take the whole financial aspect out of the relationship.

Membership, its rights and responsibilities and its procedures for coming IN and going OUT is being reviewed. This is another aspect linking with Memoranda of understanding. In addition to general policies, however, we need what is sometimes called “tough love” in applying standards. And in my opinion, any religion that doesn’t have standards, doesn’t deserve to be called a religion.

ICUU is not a democratic organisation unless you believe that it is OK in a democracy to distribute votes so that one group of 20 people has half as much voting power as another group of 100,000 people. And this was intentional! ICUU is a forum for joint learning, discussion, and mutual assistance. To assist joint learning we have to enable groups from widely different cultures and economic levels to speak on an equal basis. Because there is no link between ability to pay and ability to speak, we live with one foot in an ideal world of modeling justice and sharing personal truths but with another foot uncomfortably close an unreal world which says that money and financial commitment do not matter. How we live with this tension will determine how successfully we

work through the next couple years of global financial uncertainty. Again, Core Budget, Core Relationships, and Tough Love will be useful watchwords.

The teenage motif for ICUU is easy to relate to has its very good uses. ICUU at 14 years is a teenager. But let me provide another image based on recent personal experience of transition, specifically Barbara and myself. We married fairly late in life with 120 years combined ages. We have decided to celebrate anniversary months rather than anniversary years, and we observe to each other on the 26th of each month that we have had another month of wedded bliss. Our last anniversary was our 91st. We have a grandson who at 13 months is just making his transition from crawling, to pulling himself up to a standing position, to taking his first steps while holding on to something or someone. In the next few weeks he will venture out on his feet with his first uncertain steps at age 14 months. And shortly after that, Barbara and I, who can now barely keep up with his crawling, will have an even harder time keeping up with his running all over the place exploring his world and exercising his curiosity at a new level of interaction and developing his “capacity”. May it be the case that ICUU is now finding its legs and learning the new skills that will take us further along life’s journey.