

Benced - The heart of rural community

“Gathering together – is the beginning.

Being together – is a process.

Working together – is succes.”

Benced is situated in the heart of Szeklerland, 16 kms from Szekelyudvarhely. It has 180 inhabitants. It has 2 parts - Upper Benced and Down Benced. In 2006 became separate congregation with the minister Makkai Ilkei Ildiko.

The name of the village appeared for the first time in 1480. The Unitarian Church of Benced begun to build its first church in 1803, which was finished in 1805. The second, today church was built between 1857-1860, during minister Torok Samuel and president Pap Mozes, with the help of the members of the church from Upper and Down Benced. The church was built without tower, which was added between 1990-1993, and in 2002 in the tower was put 2 bells.

The plan to build the Church of Upper Benced was decided in 1859, which was finished maybe (without exact dates) in 1911, because it was inaugurated in December of 1911. The tower was built later, between 1929–30, on the South part of the church. This church was completely renovated in 2009.

The village got a sister village in 1990 from Belgium, Ittre. The fruit of this relationship was the Foundation, NGO, with the aim to advance Benced. Unfortunately this relationship has broken, the activities of the NGO has stopped. But in 2006 it was renewed, reestablished with new staff: Páll Krisztina - president, Pap Benczédi Gyula - vicepresident, Pap István - secretary, Pap Eniko – financial responsible. Revived, rebuilt in 2005, became a very active organization, writing and earning a lot of projects with the aim of rural development, especially Benced’s developement.

So the main aim of the foundation is to develop the village, to look forward to the future. We organized a lot of meetings with the inhabitants clarifying the main obstacles, needs of the village in order to resolve them. The first meeting was organized by the America Unitarian Universalist Church, with help of Richard Ford, Cathy Cordes, Sztranyiczky Zsofia etc. It was in 2006 - Community Capacity Building Assessment. This meeting moved forward the events, moved the inhabitants. This kind of assessment was organized anytime was necessary.

One of the main aims of the Foundation is at the same time: education and well information.

Because the school was closed, the kids have to go far away, in vacations; holidays because of less of the money they don’t have any possibilities to go many pats. Basing on these reasons we organize our activities.

The Foundation and the Church is in very good collaboration, working together every time.

NGO is a great possibility at the same time to write and put down grants.

Here are the activities organized in a good collaboration between the Church and the Foundation between 2006-2010:

- Our newspaper, Bencédi Zarándok appears monthly continuously from 2006. From 2009 it appears in Hanska, in our partnerchurch's newsletter and webpage. The English variant can be observed on the web page www.norauuchurch.org. The Hungarian variant on www.benced.ro.
- From 2006 we organize the english-ecological camp, what is supported by grants earned annually the Harghita County Council, by Local Council and other sponsors.
- From 2006 annually we organize the Seniors Day, which is supported by Harghita County Council, by Local Council and other sponsors. In that day we organize cultural events, the people who are over 70 years old got food packets, we pleased them with a festive program, and they got a special newspaper dedicated especially them with title: Let's stroke the old heads! This is the title of the program, too.
- We organized Meeting of Local Development Agents of the region.
- Dávid Ferenc Youth Association of Benced was formed in 2006, with who we run a dramatic (acting, theatrical) society, we organized feast, we organized the 33rd. Transylvanian Unitarian Youth Conference in 2009. The village with 180 inhabitants hosted more than 200 visitors.
- In December of 2006 was established the Women Association of Benced. They meet weekly between Advent and Easter, having invited specialists, guest speakers (psychologists, doctors etc) hosting and visiting other Women Associations, having biblical readings, having tea, cakes.
- We established a telecottage, telecommunication house in the village financed by a grant of Harghita County Council. Here is redacted monthly the local newspaper, at the same time it plays the role of a community centre, community house. The telecommunication house's building is in service as an uniform informational centre in the village, where the village's inhabitants may take advantage of different services (photocopying, internet, scanning etc.)
- Internet in many houses.
- Likewise inside Harghita County Program framework, grants and from other supports we organize the Day of the Earth annually, our environment protection application was successful, with a title *The clearest village of a Nyikó Valley*, furthermore selective PET bottle with a collector and pressing we take action, the organizing of village cleanings.
- With support of Harvest Hope Foundation, Local Council, we established a toilet in the local cultural centre, we innovated a community office.

- In autumn of 2006. village board (sign) prepared by carver artists, village board inauguration with a cultural program
- Inside the framework of an environment protection project we attend on exchange of experience in Hungary, visiting an eco-village visit on Kozárd
- In 2007 with the help of Unitarian Church Of Benced, Szalon KFT (private company), the Advanced Label Tehnologies (private company), Grants (Harghita County Council), Ittre Benced Foundation appeared the monography of Benced Village written by our minister, Makkai ilkei Ildiko. The book appeared for the first time on the I. Meeting Of the Village, on which cca. 400 celebrating bought parts.
- 1st of September, 2006. Commemoration of the flood from Nyiko Valley the with which occasion made an appearance the Székelyudvarhely folk dance and were present were the members of American-universalist church's
- We organized a free computer course for the local population
- We made the webpage of the village: www.benced.ro. Thanks to Pap Attila- webpage administrator, Richard Ford- sponsor.
- Annually on Christmas we chant with the youth of Benced, we go to everybody, we are knocking on the door and sing Christmas songs.
- Appeared the short film about Benced and the village appeared in a booklet by Civitas Foundation entitled: Successful rural civil initiations.
- We renovated it totally in 2009 and blessed the our church of Upper Benced
- We inaugurated a playground in his 2010. with help of Harghita County Council, Unitarian Church Of Benced, Ittre Benced Foundation and the Local Council
- 2009 - we begun to renew the relationship with our Partner Church from Hanska Nora Church, making visit, also.
- 2010 - appeared the flyer of Benced , English and Hungarian version, which was financed by a grant.
- 2010 - we earned 5 grants for Benced: Youth Program, Seniors Program, Playground, Sport Program- especially football, tourism program.
- 2010. June- exchange visit to Hungary visiting special eco-villages.
- 2010 - The house of minister was completely renewed, the old building of the school was renovated, added a new room for meetings, also.

Pall Krisztina,
President of Ittre Benced Foundation.