

Flower Communion Service for All Ages

Rev. Roger Jones, Rev. Lucy Bunch
Sunday, June 5, 2016
Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Hymns

#305 De Colores; #8 Mother Spirt, Father Spirt;
#346 Come Sing a Song with Me.

Homily

The Czech Unitarian Flower Communion is about sharing and enjoying flowers with others. Many of you brought fresh flowers and placed them here in these vases. All of you will be invited to take a flower with you, which someone else has given. Even if you didn't know to bring a flower today, we have plenty to go around. Don't be shy.

Also called the Flower Celebration, this ritual was created almost 100 years ago in Prague, by a Czech minister and his wife, Norbert Capek and Maja Capek. Born a Roman Catholic, he became disillusioned with what he saw as the cynical attitudes of church priests. He became a Baptist at age 18, and soon entered the ministry.

As a Baptist preacher and missionary he distributed Bibles and started new congregations. His theology grew more and more liberal. Even as a Baptist, his criticism of the Catholic priesthood continued. The blowback from the church and state forced Capek to leave the country in 1914, 102 years ago.

Norbert, Maja and the family came to the United States and stayed for seven years. He served a few churches as a Baptist minister, but his beliefs kept shifting, and he left that path.

The family joined the Unitarian church in Orange, New Jersey, "having been led there by their children's enthusiasm for the church's religious education program."¹

In the 1920s the family returned home and built a Unitarian church in Prague. The church grew to have 3,000 members, the largest Unitarian church in the world. It also helped other ones to start in Czechoslovakia.

Because Capek's church had many former Catholics, Protestants and Jews in it, he wanted to create a ritual in which all members could participate without any reservations, in order to bind the members closer together in spirit and fellowship. They created the Flower Communion and began celebrating it every year on the first Sunday of June.

During the Nazi occupation by Germany, the Capek family became activists, and Norbert spoke out from the pulpit for freedom and against the Nazis. The late husband of one of our members grew up in Prague and attended the Unitarian Church. Nancy Oprsal says that armed Nazi guards would stand at the church's doorways during the service. Some congregation members would harbor people in their homes to protect them from the Nazis.

When they needed to let the support network know the people needed help in escaping from the country, they would place one particular flower on the altar to altar to let folks they had someone in need of help. They would use a white flower that bloomed all year along, and when they needed to let others know that they were harboring someone, they'd let Capek know it was time to have another Flower Communion so they could make the signal.

In 1941, the Gestapo arrested Norbert and his daughter, Zora, who was 29. She was sentenced to a forced labor camp. Her father was executed in the Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

After the war, Maja Capek moved to the United States, and joined First Parish of Cambridge, Massachusetts. She brought the Flower Communion to them, and that's how it was introduced to North American Unitarian Universalists.

Today, on this warm and peaceful day of June, we will celebrate this ritual, which began amid political struggle as a sign of unity, an embrace of diversity, and a gesture of hope.

Amen and blessed be.

¹ "Norbert F. Capek," in *Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography*, accessed online June 1, 2014: <http://uudb.org/articles/norbertcapek.html>