

*The Language of Flowers:*  
*A Reflection for Flower Communion Sunday*  
The Unitarian Universalist Society of Schenectady  
Sunday, June 5, 2016  
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It is traditional on this day to tell the story of Norbert and Maja Capek, creators of the Flower Communion tradition. In this act we weave together the Unitarian traditions in Europe, and on this continent, reminding us of the diversity of our faith tradition, of the courage of people of faith standing up to systems of oppression.

Norbert Capek was a Baptist minister born in Czechoslovakia. His liberal teachings and writings brought him to the attention of the government, who didn't like what he had to say... so, he escaped to the United States in 1914, just at the start of World War I. While he was waiting for the war to end, he lived in New Jersey where he joined a Unitarian church, and he met and married another person who came from Czechoslovakia ...her name was Maja Otavek.

When it seemed safe to return to Europe, the family moved back to Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, and founded what began as a Liberal Religious Fellowship, which then affiliated with the Unitarians, and quickly grew to become the world's largest Unitarian church, with a membership of 3,200 people!

Rev. Capek introduced the Flower Communion to his congregation in 1923 as a spiritual ritual to celebrate the Unitarian belief **in** and commitment **to** the uniqueness of each individual. Each individual is unique as each flower is unique, and we create a unified faith community by celebrating that uniqueness, that diversity in unity.

Norbert Capek wrote about our Unitarian faith. He said "What kind of religion is this Unitarianism? It is humanity lightened by divinity. It is humanism and theism combined. What else is it but to begin with man when seeking God? Our age calls for watchmen who would stand on the crossroad and warn people to go from views only terrestrial and selfish to cosmic views, from Humanity to Divinity."

Maja Otavec Capek returned to the United States in 1939 on a speaking tour to raise support for the refugee programs in Czechoslovakia. She was unable to return to Europe due to the expansion of Nazi Germany's control there. Her husband Norbert, who was at that time seventy years old, chose to remain to work for liberty and reason in his homeland, Czechoslovakia.

Under the Nazi occupation, Capek's church, which was widely known by the name Unitaria, held services on Sunday and Tuesday, drawing increasing numbers of worshippers in that time of oppression. In 1941, Capek was arrested, tried for treason in German courts, and sent to Dachau concentration camp. By this time, he was 72 years old, living under the harshest work camp conditions, terrible hunger, and exposure to harsh weather.

In the fourteen short weeks of his life at Dachau, an eyewitness reported that "he always was in a good mood and was able to encourage all the people around him" -- a camp survivor later

reported, "if it hadn't been for Capek I probably wouldn't be alive now, nor would the others who survived." Rev. Norbert Capek, living his values of hope, generosity and kindness to others right until the end, was executed in November 1942.

Capek's wife Maja introduced the Flower Communion from her Czech homeland to Unitarian churches in the United States. We continue to celebrate this ritual, still fresh after many years. Each flower is unique, each unfolds in its own way, and gathered together the flowers create an abundant beauty in their variety. This gentle symbol has the power to memorialize the life and commitment of a courageous religious leader, and the commitment of all those who sacrifice their lives for a larger cause... for love.

### **Flower Ceremony**

In respectful memory of the power of love, I dedicate our flowers this morning with the traditional prayer and consecration of the flowers that Norbert Capek wrote over ninety years ago, for a Unitarian congregation half a world away:

"In the name of Providence, which implants in the seed the future of the tree and in the hearts of people the longing for to live in love; in the name of the highest, in whom we move and who makes the mother, the brother and sister what they are; in the name of sages and great religious leaders, who sacrificed their lives to hasten the coming of the kingdom of true relationship let us renew our resolution, sincerely to be real brothers and sisters regardless of any kind of bar which estranges one person from another. In this holy resolution may we be strengthened knowing that we are God's family; that one spirit, the spirit of love, unites us; and endeavor for a more perfect and more joyful life leads us on."

Let us pray. "Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask thy blessing on these thy messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid diversities of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to thy holy will. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another's talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do thy work in this world."