

Flower Communion

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The Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene
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Capek's Flower Celebration

The Flower Communion, or Flower Celebration, is one of my favorite times to be a Unitarian Universalist. It is one of the few genuinely original Unitarian rituals, it is colorful, and it has become associated with social justice, including civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.

The Flower Communion service was created by Norbert Capek (1870-1942) who founded the Unitarian Church in Czechoslovakia after petitioning for support from American Unitarians for years. He introduced this special service to his packed church in Prague on June 4, 1923. For some time he had felt the need for some symbolic ritual that would bind people more closely together...

He turned to the native beauty of their countryside for elements of a ritual which would be genuine to them. This simple service was the result. It became an annual ritual...

Then, as now, people were asked to bring a flower of their own choice, from their gardens, from the roadside or from a florist! Each person adds their flower to the vase, signifying their unique presence amongst the others, freely offered. The vase or basket holding the flowers signifies our community which flourishes when each individual flourishes.

Dr. Capek blessed the flowers with a prayer, and at the end of the service, people took, as today we will take, a flower from the vase or basket other than the one we had brought. This signifies to me the varied blessings people take from this community. Just as each person brings unique gifts, each person takes away unique gifts. And just as your flower may leave this building without your seeing it leave, your gifts of presence – kindness, attention, respect -- these may bless others without your knowledge.

The Capeks met and fell in love in America, in New York City. In 1922, they returned to Czechoslovakia and founded the Prague Congregation of Liberal Religious Fellowship with support from the American Unitarian Association, and the congregation quickly grew to the thousands.

In 1939, Maya Capek returned to the United States for what was supposed to be a brief speaking tour, but she could not return due to the war. During this time she introduced the flower celebration to the First Parish in Cambridge, and

it spread quickly from there. Only after the war did she learn of her husband's death. In 1941, Norbert and their youngest daughter Zora were arrested by the Gestapo, and he was sent to Dachau in 1942.

And so the flower celebration as the Capeks called it, the flower communion as it is more widely known today, this is also a ritual of remembrance and gratitude for a martyr of liberal religion.

Just as our colorful bouquet is made up of each of us, so is it made up of those who have gone before us, those whose words and dreams and creations and courage inspire and sustain and guide us today.