

## **Worship Script July 19, 2011**

### **With the Unitarian Church in Kézdivásárhely, Romania (Transylvania)**

Presented by Rev. Mark Evens

#### **Chiming of the Hour**

#### **Call To Worship:**

Today we celebrate North American Unitarian Universalist history, and the Transylvanian Unitarian history...of connecting with others like us and yet also very different from us around the world. We celebrate and renew the partner church relationship between Ann Arbor and Kézdivásárhely. Today, with a flower communion, we celebrate each other's beautiful faces and complex natures. We note and affirm that we have much in common, **and** are each unique, as individuals and as congregations.

Each Sunday our congregation lights a chalice. The flaming chalice as a symbol of our faith originated during World War II. Members of the North American Unitarian Service Committee were working based in Portugal to help persecuted minorities flee the Nazi regime. To make their documents look more official an artist combined two elements: the chalice, a symbol of the fullness of life available to us, and as reminder of goodness shared in community, and a flame, a symbol of the power of learning, and of love.

Please stand and read with me our chalice lighting words printed in the order of service and then remain standing for our next song:

#### **Lighting of the Chalice (In Unison)**

We light this chalice for the light of truth;

We light this chalice for the warmth of love;

We light this chalice for the energy of action;

We light this chalice for the harmony of peace.

#### **Prayer and Meditation**

God of many names, Spirit of Life, Spirit of love, mystery of existence exceeding our understanding. We gather each week to center ourselves with that which is greater than all of us. Help us all to use every day for love, blessing, and meaning. Help us to be a comfort those around us. Help us to accept the caring we need. Let us hold in our hearts all who are struggling to regain health and balance. Let us hold in our hearts all who are worried about loved ones. Let us hold in our hearts all that are grieving. Let us be mindful of those who daily work and risk their lives for our safety and security. Let us hold in our hearts all who work for justice and peace in every possible way.

Those of us who are certain of our self sufficiency, help us to know that we are saved, not by self-sufficiency, but by our capacity to connect with others and to move in harmony with forces of life greater than ourselves. For those of us in despair, may we notice those births of new beginnings, of new hope, of new harmonies and opportunities in the world around us. For those of us who come today in grief may there be healing and understanding. For those of us who come with uncertainty, may there be reassurance. For those of us who come today with joy and confidence, may we share our joy and confidence with love.

### **Blessing of the Flowers**

I offer you now words from Norbert Capek's original prayer of consecration of the flowers:

Infinite Spirit of life, we ask your blessing on these messengers of fellowship and love. ... May they ... remind us of the value of comradeship.... May we cherish friendship as a most precious gift. ...

May we be strengthened by the knowledge that one spirit, the spirit of love, unites us, and may we endeavor together for a more joyful life for all. Amen and Blessed Be

### **Homily: The Flower of Flower Communion**

Flower communion celebrates our diversity, and our unity. Flower communion encourages acceptance and sharing of ourselves with each other. We strive to do that within our congregation in Ann Arbor. For us it is a time to claim and celebrate our unity which includes many diverse theological perspectives...

...

We also strive to connect with and learn from diversity beyond the walls of our congregation and beyond the borders of our country.

In the North America we include in our Unitarian Universalist religious life practices of **cultural interchange**. We include readings, songs and stories from other faith traditions in our published hymnal. We draw from other sources beyond our hymnal in crafting our worship services. We are fond quoting our 19<sup>th</sup> Century transcendentalist Unitarian minister Samuel Longfellow who said, "revelation is not sealed."

Flower communion comes to us as a product of such **cultural interchange**, and out of the creative process of religious growth and development.

Together, Maja and Norbert Capek took the flower of Unitarianism from **humanity's common vase of spiritual life** and made it their own.

To **humanity's common vase of spiritual life** they returned the Flower Communion ritual itself. The Flower Communion is offered to all of us to deepen our reflection on the beauty of our diversity, and the value of community.

### **Homily: The Dance of Partnership [1102]**

Twelve years ago our two congregations began a sort of dance that has continued to this day.

Since its beginning there have been visits back and forth. Groups of various sizes from Ann Arbor have journeyed to meet you and learn about your lives. We have had the privilege of hosting, visiting with, and worshipping with Rev. Maria Pap and Ildiko Bucs in Ann Arbor a number of times as well.

**This partnership requires, and offers us opportunities for continual renewal.**

And so we are here together once more. I and six others from Ann Arbor have the pleasure of taking the next turn or two around the dance floor with you, our partners in faith.

**In this partnership dance we take turns leading.**

We strive for a balance between being firm in our own identities, and being willing to meet and accept the other with all of their differences. We seek out ways to move together. We seek ways to encounter and feel how the forces of life move through each others' lives. Yet we also want each to keep their own balance, to stand on their own feet. (We are not up for big "dips" or shoulder tosses) In dancing, I mean the partnered type, the two people move in harmony.

There is a shared desire to move together with the music...to be graceful, and gracious to one another. So it is also with our partnership as congregations.

**We started this partnership because of the truth we celebrate in the flower communion:** As long as we recognize the importance of the critical things we have in common, we can all learn and benefit from our differences. When we bring our diversities together it makes life richer and more beautiful.

**[Presenting the Bible Gift]**

As an acknowledgement of the roots we share in the Christian faith tradition and of the importance of this relationship to our Ann Arbor congregation, we would like to present you with this English language version of the Bible.

The inscription reads

“Then east and west will meet and share, and south will build with north, one human commonwealth of good throughout the whole wide earth’

This Bible is presented to our partners in faith, with love and support from the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, Michigan....”

Signed by our senior minister, myself, Gretchen, Phyllis, Laura, Cathy, Hayley and Edith.

**I understand that you, our Transylvanian partners want to understand better, “what is in it for us North Americans?” Why be partners? Why do this dance?**

**How does this relationship benefit our Ann Arbor congregation?**

This is very hard to address in a brief, direct way. To just scratch the surface requires beginning to appreciate the differing histories of religious freedom in Eastern Europe and North America, and how little we North Americans often know and understand about that history.

We can and do read history in books and discuss it in classes.

But it can be hard to actually feel and truly understand the importance of that history. Even for North American UU ministers, it can be hard to actually feel and truly understand the importance of that history without direct connection with people who have lived other parts of it. That is one place where you can and do help us.

**How has the Partner Church Program made my life better?**

Your catechism is not a complete match with my theology. But inspired in part by contact with your faith and practices, the first Unitarian congregation I joined, in Oakland, California, began celebrating communion, also in the remembrance of the life and ministry of Jesus, several times a year. The incorporation of this tradition into the Oakland congregation’s history and traditions enriched and deepened my spiritual life. It helped me appreciate in a new way some aspects of my Catholic upbringing, and the positive importance of the ministry of Jesus in my life.

Encountering Transylvanian Unitarianism from afar helped me reassess my Christian heritage, to reinterpret and reintegrate some parts of it that now make sense to me in new ways, and that I find useful.

That your Unitarian faith has sustained you through adversity for 445 years helps validate my religious choice to be a Unitarian.

**Life is made full, good, and abundant not merely by “good feelings.” Relationships that are meaningful are also essential. This is why many of us have children. This is why we value our families and communities so highly.**

**Through our relationships with you, our own assumptions are called to awareness and made available for questioning and reassessment.**

We connect with others of diverse backgrounds and experiences who share some of the same basic faith commitments that we do: religion that values reason, and the ethical teachings of Jesus (among others). We connect with people who share our current experience of being a religious minority in our countries and in the world.

We learn from and make meaning from our similarities AND our differences. We are all flowers, but we are different types of flowers and each of us is a unique blossom.

How do I appreciate my life as a Unitarian Universalist in the United States differently thanks to our relationship with our Transylvanian partner church?

I am more aware of the blessing we have of religious liberty, a relatively long history of political freedom, economic freedom, and civil liberties.

**What can I learn about myself and Unitarian Universalism in Ann Arbor by reflecting on Unitarianism in Transylvania?**

I can learn how forces beyond our control can shape our choices, can limit freedom.

I can learn how a faith that values individual conscience and rational inquiry can be a place of refuge and strength in the face of such forces.

I can learn how the experience of loss and vulnerability allows one to better appreciate the past, traditions, heritage and community.

May God help us keep strong now and in the years to come this bond of partnership that gives us each such opportunities for relationship, for meaning, for mutual support, for putting into practice the teachings of our religion.

Amen.

**Today's Flowers**

I would like the ushers to now come forward and carry these beautiful blossoms to the back of the church. Each of you, please take a flower with you as you leave this worship service...a different one than the one you placed in the vase, as a symbol of our acceptance of one another.

And...Mindful that there are members and friends of this church who are unable to be with us this morning, and holding in heart and mind the many members of the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor who wish you well, I am setting aside this flower to mark their space within our circle of friendship and caring.

**Benediction**

May faith in the spirit of life  
Hope for the community of earth  
And Love of the sacred in one another be ours now,  
and in all the days to come. Amen

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