

Unificationist Czechoslovakian Martyr Marie Živná's Course of Faith

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National level members' meeting at Svojanov Castle, where Marie Živná (the first person left of center) lived with her family. The members had a workshop there. In communist Czechoslovakia that constituted criminal activity.

For Czechoslovakia, 1968 was very important. For several months, it seemed that the political oppression that the nation had been suffering under would come to an end. The political changes of the so called "Prague Spring"¹ brought great hope to many people. Reforming communism and bringing peace and freedom to the nation seemed possible. The church national leader of Germany, Paul Werner, felt that this was a good time to send a missionary to Czechoslovakia. Emilie Steberl, the first missionary crossed the border on October 30, 1968, and came to Bratislava. She started a dangerous mission. How was she to witness and find new members? Under communism, our missionaries and members had to work carefully and secretly. Within a year Emilie could find twelve new members. In 1970 she had to leave Czechoslovakia because it had become too dangerous for her. At that time, the foundation for our movement was established and witnessing continued under the leadership of our Slovak sister Betka Danišková.²

Marie Živná was one of the first members of the Unification Church in Czechoslovakia -- she joined in 1972. She was a student of art at the university in the city of Brno. Michal Glonda, a brother who studied at the same university, invited Marie for a three-day seminar and explained the Divine Principle to her. Marie later mentioned that it was clear to her on the very first day that this was the truth, but she did not say that until the seminar ended. Afterward she announced that she would join our church and started to work as a full-time member. She stopped studying, though she was in her final year and had been preparing for her thesis and final exams.

Marie was a very humble person and had a religious background. She had a good heart but did not speak much, being a bit introverted. She was always ready to help others. She had a sister and a brother; her parents lived near Brno at the Svojanov Castle.³ Her father worked as the caretaker and tour guide at the castle.

Very soon Marie became the assistant to the national leader Betka Danišková. She led a very sacrificial life and protected Betka as much as she could. Marie was always taking care of the members; her smile could help solve many problems! In 1972, Marie organized a national meeting at Svojanov Castle -- more than thirty members came. Most of them were students, full of enthusiasm to change the world. This was the first national meeting in our country.

When Marie became the assistant to the national leader Betka Danišková, it was a big help. She really could forget about herself and unconditionally support our leader. Her understanding of principle was very clear and connected with God. On Christmas day, 1972, she had a very bad car accident. Four other sisters were with her in the car including Betka. That nobody died was a miracle. Marie suffered a light brain shock and lost consciousness. Betka's spinal cord was severed, paralyzing her. Marie was always thinking of her. During the entire period that Betka was in the hospital and afterward, Marie took care of her as if she were Betka's loving mother. She forgot about her own pain in order to care for Betka. Later, while in prison when she met Betka in the corridor by chance, Marie's first question was, "Do you have warm clothes, Betka?"

The communist secret police had been observing us since 1971. In September 1973, persecution of the Unification Church members began and members were arrested. Within several weeks almost thirty members were imprisoned. Marie was one of the last ones arrested. She worked silently and seemed to be invisible, so the secret police were not able to find her easily.



A lecture in Ostravice, a popular resort area in what was then Czechoslovakia

Being very close to our national leader, Betka, Marie knew many things, but Marie pretended to know nothing. She gave very little information, said nothing of importance, when the police interrogated her. Marie was arrested in late autumn 1973. With other brothers and sisters she was awaiting trial in Bratislava Prison. The trial began July 2, 1974 and lasted until July 19.

On Easter Thursday,⁴ April 16, 1974, Marie died under suspicious circumstances in prison. The prison police sent a telegram to her parents stating that their daughter was dead. They were shocked and immediately traveled to Bratislava to visit the prison. The police gave them her dead body in a copper coffin. The coffin was sealed and nobody was supposed to open it. Marie's parents did not obey the officials' instructions. They opened the coffin. What they saw was terrible -- there she lay with gray hair.

Her funeral was a big event in her home village. Marie had a very good reputation and people did not believe that she had lost her life accidentally. About a thousand people came to her funeral, many expressing doubts about her death and accusing the communist regime of killing innocent people. Marie became a symbol of resistance against communism. Also at the funeral were numerous secret agents.

In 1976 a brother had a dream about Marie. She looked very nice and healthy and had a round face. There was another girl with her in the dream. Marie said, "Why do my parents think I am dead? I live, in reality."

In 1994 True Parents recognized Marie Živná as a Unification Church martyr. She offered her life for the mission under very difficult circumstances.

Notes

1 After Alexander Dubcek -- an idealist and a close friend of Leonid Brezhnev -- became first-secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on January 5 1968. He began initiating political and economic reforms in an attempt to transform communism from within. On August 20, in the same year, Brezhnev sent in two hundred thousand Warsaw Pact troops behind two thousand tanks to quell dissent.

2 She joined in January 1969. While she led the church, they opened centers in eighteen cities and sent missionaries to other countries.

3 Once home to Přemysl Otakar II, who ruled Czech lands 1253–1278, it was rebuilt after a fire in 1842.

4 Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter on Thursday.