

Y E A R O F J U B I L E E

... it is a still night, dark sky is fading above the skyline, dawn is coming. Václav Mareček from Sulkovec shuts the gate as Rozára slips through; they prepare for a journey. It is dark outside, but few people in the village are sleeping. Seventy year old Martin Metela and Anna set off on their journey, as does Matěj Ilek with Marina. Václav Skřípský goes alone, Tomáš Šíp goes with his sister. Jan Jakubů, a farmer, departs with his young wife and his late wife's son. Many men from Polom go without their wives; their health is not good enough to partake.

Farmer Josef Břenek goes, Jan Havel too; so do farm labourers Galla and Žíla, and ploughboy Jan Vilím....Shaking hands, quiet greetings, encouragements..... Dawn arrives, the sun rises. Ah, the morning smells of spring, the refreshing dew....All is ready at the offices of the manor in Kunštát. Discourse about religion is starting.

Registration of Evangelics started on the 15th of May 1782 at seven o'clock at the manor in Kunštát. First, people from village of Louka arrive, then others and others, then those from Polom and finally villagers from Sulkovec. Questions follow questions; new people arrive, from village after village. This goes on and on until the 25th of June

A clerk carefully records answers to the four repeated questions: Age, name and status?

What is your religion? Do you have any doubts about Catholicism? Do you still want to be a Catholic? Most people answer the third and the fourth questions identically. Then they sign.

Three vertical tallies are made; no need to hide any more. They have made many crosses in their lives. As in Sulkovec, so in Polom,

Discourses in front of religious boards sprung up in various places in Bohemia and Moravia during 1782 – the Year of Jubilee. All those able to go, went: the old and the young, juveniles, simply everybody went to confess their faith which they had inherited from their fathers, a faith secretly passed from generation to generation, often at risk to their lives. Those who knew each other's opinions as well as those who were surprised to learn that their close neighbors also believed met on their way to the religious board. Farmers, farm hands and maids set out on the same trip, all equals in front of the Lord; all encouraged by the belief that they

would have their own priest, that they would not only be allowed to profess their religion openly, but also that they would be able to educate themselves and grow spiritually.

The Edict of Tolerance, issued by Josef II in October 1781 did not bring equality of religions, non-Catholics were at best tolerated.

The Edict did not permit the resumption of the protestant tradition. It did, however, allow the practice of the two dominant foreign protestant religions – Lutheran (or Augsburg) and Calvinistic (or Helvetic). Nevertheless, in many places people pronounced their belief in Christ, their membership in the Hussite religion or belonging to the Bohemian Brethren.

Inhabitants of Polom and Sulkovec were, by enlarge, well informed and professed to belong to the Helvetian religion, sometimes called Reformed religion. The Evangelists seem to have been prepared for this discourse. One can discern this from their responses to the third question (doubts about Catholicism). People in both villages answered consistently, namely that “the Chalice of the Lord had been taken away”.

In accordance with implemented regulations of the Edict of Tolerance, Evangelic congregation was allowed to be established only in those places, where 100 families or 500 people showed interest. The congregations were established widely. Evangelists from Polom and Sulkovec were assigned to Veselí, where an Evangelic church was founded as early as 1782.

Teacher Tomáš Juren, native of Prosetín, played an important role not only in construction of church in Veselí, but in establishing the congregation as well. Prior to the enactment of the Edict, Tomáš Juren had worked as a school teacher in Sulkovec. His powers of persuasion were well known. Labeled a heretic, Tomáš Juren had spent 8 days in subterranean prison in Olešnice, prior to being dismissed from his teaching job. Well respected, the devout often followed him to Ubušín, where he had moved, to be advised especially on religious matters. It would appear Tomas Juren had a hand in the advising of co-religionists for the discourses.

It must have been he who explained the sacred to the Evangelists in Sulkovec, insofar as the so called Helvetic or Reformed Religion was close to the beliefs of their fathers, and not only as far as dogma, but formally as well, as noted by simple decoration of their church.

Further, it is believed that it was Tomáš Juren, who participated in the founding of the congregation during their difficult times in Veselí.

The inceptions of most tolerance congregations were problematic.

Not only did these starting congregations struggle with poverty and lack of understanding, they were at times subjected to physical attacks as well. Priests were hard to come by. Frequently they came from Hungary, and had to struggle with both the abominable poverty and the complicated Czech language. Notwithstanding the difficulties, life of tolerated Evangelics in the newly created congregations progressed and found acceptance in most villages.

A registration chart from villages of Polom and Sulkovec shows the names of Evangelics, their age and status. Entries for minors living in a single cottage were cited as whole, their names and ages were not recorded.

Although the data in the registration forms are rather fragmentary and often with virtually identical entries, these tolerance registration forms nevertheless cast light on social life toward the end of the 16th century and thus contribute to the understanding of life in the country from a point of view not otherwise available in historic materials.

Recorded individual entries serve as a valuable resource for the study of history of both individual villages and the country as a whole. The journeys, the “pilgrimages” of individuals to the board, often into distant places, is a testimony of their convictions and bravery.

We do not know their faces; we do not know their voices. But we know that they sought to live in truth.