

The Laity Minute

May 2019

Mother's Day is a highlight of the month of May. It is a time when we can honor, remember, celebrate, and rejoice our Mothers. Over the years Mother's Day, as many other holidays, has become quite commercialized. Holidays are big business. In fact, Americans spent about \$23 billion on Mother's Day in 2018. That number is expected to increase in 2019. It is one of the largest spending holidays of the year surpassing Easter, Halloween, and Valentine's Day according to some studies.

However, Mother's Day hasn't always been this way. It originated as a much different day with a different intention. What is more interesting is that Mother's Day has deep Methodist roots.

Ann Reeves Jarvis, a Methodist and peace activist, and her daughter, Anna, pioneered the idea of Mother's Day. (Ann and Anna were members of historic Old St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia.) They originated the thought that this day should highlight the work of women and the significant testimony women could give about the need for peace. Ann started by organizing women's clubs in the 1860s to serve suffering mothers and children. Ann and her family lived in a coal-mining area of West Virginia and saw daily the suffering of those around her. The mother's clubs she formed taught other women how they could help their suffering community with childcare and medical training. She also recruited nurses for the field hospital built nearby when the Civil War started. Ann was totally convinced mothers had to work for peace due to the effects of the war on the men and their families of the community.

After several years of lobbying along with local merchant John Wannamaker, they convinced President Woodrow Wilson to sign a petition to proclaim Mother's Day as a national holiday in 1914. While Ann died before Mother's Day became an official holiday, Anna (not a mother herself) saw the idea through and stayed true to the purpose of the celebration.

Anna thought Mother's Day should be a time one should sit and write a personal letter to his or her Mother. She thought it was a time to give her a simple, inexpensive carnation, a flower whose petals are tightly held like a mother's love, as she liked to think of it. She stressed it was a day to visit or attend church with Mom.

In her later years, Anna became an outspoken critic of the commercialization of Mother's Day. She had a lot to say to Hallmark! She thought companies had misinterpreted the idea of Mother's Day and exploited it for the sake of profit. Anna said, "How lazy can you be to buy a card with someone else's sentiment to give to your Mother?" In the 1920s she wrote, "To have Mother's Day the burdensome, wasteful, expensive day that Christmas and other special days have become, is not our pleasure." She also was critical of the Salvation Army for significantly increasing the price of carnations. Anna even protested at a candy makers' convention in 1923.

I believe Ann and Anna may be slightly appalled at the over \$23 billion spent on the holiday. They would probably discourage the pre-made cards, bags of candy, and lunch reservations at the local restaurant. However, I also believe if we dig a little deeper, we can still see the original intent and significance of the holiday.

As Methodists, they knew the importance of a bigger purpose. Ann and Anna had a sense of spreading peace and love to others. They knew the value of a personal letter and a simple flower. They had the idea of mission always on their minds and wanted to help others who were suffering. They gave their entire being to their cause mentally, physically, and spiritually.

So, let us remember and honor mothers and those who mother. Let us also remember the Methodist women who originated the idea of Mother's Day and saw it all the way through to the President's desk.

Peace!



Ann Jarvis

Anna Jarvis