

Mother's Day: Second Sunday in May

Celebration of Mothers over the centuries has appeared in varying forms and traditions since and possibly before Roman times.

In the 1600s' the Church of England instigated Mothering Sunday in recognition of Mary the Mother of Jesus. Later this religious celebration was expanded to include honouring all mothers. As time passed, this celebration slowly disappeared from the church calendar.

The seed for Mother's Day that we celebrate today had its beginning in 1858 with Ann Marie Reeves Jarvis a Christian lady who was working to heal the nation after the Civil War. Her strategy was to promote and elevate the important role of mothers and help them to create healthier and more hygienic homes.

From this she instigated a 'Mothers Friendship Day' which eventually developed into a national movement called 'Mothers Friendship Clubs'. At these clubs Ann would teach the mothers basic nursing and safe sanitation practices to be used in the home, which she had learned from her brother who was a famous M.D.

This resulted in many lives being saved and by offering this service to both sides of those involved in the Civil War it was instrumental in facilitating the reconciliation process between Union and Confederate neighbours.

When Ann Marie Jarvis passed away after a long illness, one of her two daughters, Anna decided to dedicate her life to her mother's dream of a Mother's Day to honour all mothers around the world.

Anna missed her mother greatly and felt children often neglected to appreciate their mother enough while the mother was still alive.

As a Sunday school teacher for twenty years at her church, she was very aware of the Fifth of the Ten Commandments, "Honour your father and mother" and no doubt would have taught this to her students.

She shared her desire to bring to fruition her mother's dream and it was readily accepted by her friends. The first such service was held at her church and she handed out her mother's favourite flower, the White Carnation. At first, people observed Mother's Day by attending church and writing letters to their mothers.

After much letter writing and lobbying the Governors of Oklahoma and West Virginia in 1910 proclaimed the Second Sunday in May to be celebrated as Mother's Day. The acceptance of this celebration throughout the USA was breath taking. By 1911 there was not one state in the USA that did not have its own observance of Mother's Day.

On May 9th 1914, President Woodrow Wilson, proclaimed the Second Sunday in May as Mother's Day and a national holiday. It was not long before the Mother's Day celebration was embraced by other nations as far away as Japan, China, Africa, South America and some Asian countries.

Within ten years, the rapid commercialisation and exploitation of this sacred and joyous celebration for Mothers caused Anna much grief. She went on to spend her inheritance fighting against the abuse of this Christian based celebration and said that she 'wished she would never have started the day because it became so out of control...'

Despite Anna Jarvis's misgivings, Mother's Day has flourished all around the world. In the USA the Second Sunday in May has become the most popular day of the year to dine out, and the telephone lines record their highest traffic.

However let us not forget the original intention as set out by God to celebrate and honour the mothers in our families, in our churches and in our society.

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