

Mother's Day brings thoughts of peace



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By the Rev. Andrew Clive Millard
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My mother gets Mother's Day twice each year.

Mother's Day in the United States — and in many places around the world — is recognized on the second Sunday in May. But Mother's Day in the United Kingdom is celebrated sometime in March or early April. The date changes each year because it's actually a Christian festival called Mothering Sunday that takes place on the fourth Sunday in Lent in honor of Jesus' mother, Mary, and the "mother church."

So, over a month ago my mother received a card from my sister, who lives in the north of England, and last week, my mother received

a card from me. Or, at least, she should have. I'll be calling her this afternoon to see if the postal service delivered it in time.

In the United States, Mother's Day has been celebrated for about a hundred years, thanks to the efforts of Anna Jarvis of West Virginia. She held a memorial to her mother — also named Anna Jarvis — on May 12, 1907, and in 1912 created the Mother's Day International Association. Mother's Day became a nationally recognized holiday in 1914.

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The idea for Mother's Day in the United States goes back further, though, to the 1850s. The Unitarian Universalist hymn book, "Singing the Living Tradition," includes the following reading:

Arise, then, women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or of fears!

Say firmly: "We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies.

"Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

"Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

"We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."

From the bosom of the devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!"

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession.

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As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as the means whereby the great human family can live in peace,

And each bearing after her own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

This "Mother's Day Proclamation" was written in 1870 by Julia Ward Howe, who is more well known for penning the words to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Howe and her husband, Samuel, were Unitarians active in a number of social causes, in particular the abolitionist movement to free slaves.

During the Civil War, they were invited to Washington by President Lincoln. After visiting a Union army camp and hearing the singing of "John Brown's Body" by the soldiers, Howe was inspired to write new lyrics. The Atlantic Monthly published her verses, for which the magazine paid her \$4, naming it "The Battle Hymn of the Republic".

Howe was committed to the Civil War as a tool to end slavery. But as time went on, she saw more of the effects of war that went beyond the cost to the soldiers themselves to the widows and orphans who were left behind. She also experienced the economic crises that affected both North and South in the aftermath of the Civil War. When war broke out in Europe in 1870, Julia issued her Mother's Day Proclamation, calling on women around the world to come together across all that divides humanity in support of a Mother's Day for Peace.

Howe was influenced by a young Appalachian homemaker who in 1858 had tried to organize what she called Mothers' Work Days to improve sanitary conditions for both sides of the Civil War. That young homemaker's name? Anna Jarvis, mother of the Anna Jarvis who, knowing of her mother's and Julia Ward Howe's efforts, finally succeeded in establishing Mother's Day some 56 years later.

So this Mother's Day, perhaps you'll take the time not only to think of your own mother, and your grandmothers, and the countless women in your ancestry who birthed and raised generations of children, but also to think of the mothers and grandmothers in other places around the world who yearn for better conditions for their children and grandchildren, for peace within the greater human family.

The Rev. Andrew Clive Millard is minister to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Peninsula in Newport News. He can be reached at: minister@uufp.org

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