

FATHERS DAY and the Christian Connection

Another in the series of "and the Christian Connection."

The year their only son was born saw John and Sonora Dodd attending the Mother's Day service at their church. As mentioned in a previous article on the Christian Connection to Mother's Day, this was a celebration that was only just coming into vogue, due to the efforts of Anna Jarvis.

As Sonora listened to the sermon and heard from the Scriptures the virtues of Mothers and Motherhood, her mind went back over her childhood. Sonora pondered about the notion of there being a Father's Day, too.

She remembered how her father William, a Civil War veteran, lost his wife as she gave birth to a sixth child. Sonora was only sixteen at the time, the eldest, and much of the role to raise her five brothers fell on her shoulders.

Through those difficult years she remembered her father "as a very strict man" but also "a kind and loving parent who kept them together and happy."

After the church service she felt inspired to propose that fathers receive equal recognition. Her Pastor was very encouraging and supported her as she approached the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Ministerial Alliance. Both these organisations endorsed Sonora's Father's Day idea.

There had been other attempts by a number of Christian folk and a Lions Club International member to instigate a Father's Day celebration. However Sonora Dodd's protracted efforts appeared to have gained the most traction and public support

Her Father's Day concept was further advanced by a front page item of the Spokane Chronicle, June 6, 1910. Here is part of the front page article reproduced below setting out the aims and goals of such a celebration

"A Fathers' Day would call attention to such constructive teachings from the pulpit as would naturally point out;

- *The father's place in the home.*
- *The training of children.*
- *The safeguarding of the marriage tie.*
- *The protection of womanhood and childhood.*

The meaning of this, whether in the light of religion or of patriotism, is so apparent as to need no argument in behalf of such a day."

Sonora was advocating for the first Sunday in June, which was close to her father's birthday, (as he was still alive). However, most Pastors went for the third Sunday in June and many of the churches in the area chose to give roses to the men as they celebrated their first Father's Day, just as carnations were for Mother's Day.

The popularity of the Father's Day celebration was very slow compared to the growth of the Mother's Day celebration which became a nationally accepted celebration within two to three years of its inception in 1908.

It took about fifteen years to have some sort of national representation and it was not until 1972 that the then President of the United States, Richard Nixon signed it into law.

Local businesses that had already profited from the Mother's Day celebration started taking out newspaper ads with a Father's Day theme. Many trade groups that would benefit most, for example manufacturers of ties, belts and braces, helped Sonora to receive national coverage for Father's Day. The powerful New York Associated Menswear Retailers founded the Father's Day Council to help Sonora. By the mid-eighties the Father's Council wrote that, "Father's Day has become the Second Christmas for all the men's gift-orientated industries."

Some 72 countries celebrate this event on the third Sunday in June whereas Australia, New Zealand and some of the Pacific Islands celebrate this event on the first Sunday in September.

Sonora Dodd's efforts to celebrate and promote Fathers' Day were a practical expression of what the Lord had ordained in the Fifth of The Ten Commandments "Honour your Father and your Mother."

May this biblical and divine instruction become a reality in our lives.

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