

Honoring Families

Each year, I get asked about marking Mother's Day and Father's Day in church, so I'd like to respond before anyone gets too far in planning.

The family setting is often the first place one encounters the idea of God, and in which prayer and faith practices are taught and reinforced. Joys and sorrows within families are marked within the faith community; everything from baptisms to profession of faith at adulthood, marriage, death, joy, and sorrow.

The Episcopal Church has a broad understanding of "Family" that includes groups of all sorts: some linked across generations; some choosing to be family to each other without shared biology; families of adults; families that include children; families with fewer or larger numbers of parents; families for a season of life; families extending for multiple generations.

There are several strands in the history of Mother's Day observances. One might mark the day by returning to the church in which one was raised - the 'Mother church' - to refresh early tenets of faith. Women raising children without benefit of community were offered lessons on nutrition, child-rearing, or accessing resources. Women on opposing sides of the Civil War joined hands demanding reconciliation, a practice that is present in several places today. The practices of gift-giving swelled during the years following national recognition of Mother's Day, much to the chagrin of the people who asked for that recognition because the commercialization was counter to their original intention. Father's Day was inaugurated shortly after Mother's Day and has followed a similar path toward commercialism.

The Prayer Book does not include Collects for these holidays, though there are several prayers in circulation that speak to the tendering and mentoring done by many men and women, of their own children and of young people in their care. Some of those prayers include the acknowledgement of suffering that occurs within family systems and the pain of being ostracized within or without families of origin. We may use prayers of dedication and thanksgiving during the months of May and June, evoking gratitude for care given and received; I will select ones that do not presume the manner of tending and teaching as set by gender, or imply a narrow definition of family, precisely so that we can celebrate the many ways God invites us to find community with one another.

Rather than have small gifts for men or women who may be known as fathering or mothering children, I suggest that remembrances and thanksgivings for those who have been your guides and providers be made to the Arlington Thrive program for families in need. You may also consider a thankoffering for the children who were placed in your care for a moment or a lifetime, so that other families may have what they need to provide for young people. Information on Arlington Thrive program offerings is on the bulletin board, along with envelopes that may be placed in the offering plates.

Thank you, Julie+