



CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS
AND SPIRITUAL LIFE



Supporting Religious and Spiritual Practices at Macalester

Over the years the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life (CRSL) has provided you with information about religious holidays and observances. Our Religious Holy Days Calendar has ranged from a multi-page document to a single page document. A single document cannot provide the guidance needed to be an inclusive community with respect to Religious and Spiritual Practice. As a community committed to inclusion, it is appropriate that we are planful, responsive and thoughtful about how to support practices, without excluding individuals from community life.

Calendars and traditions: nuances to navigate

Dates

The Macalester college (and U.S. civil) calendar favors Western Christianity, which keeps time on the Gregorian calendar (a mostly solar calendar). As such, there is less burden - for observance and practice - placed on those who follow western expressions of Christianity. Mindful that Christianity has multiple expressions, the Eastern & Greek Orthodox Christian community follow the Julian calendar. These two calendars usually do not align for major religious holidays. This is why two dates appear on the calendar for major religious holy days and seasons in Christianity.

The Hijri calendar (a lunar calendar) which is based on the monthly cycle of the moon's phases - drives the dates of months and holidays for the Islamic calendar. This purely lunar calendar has fewer days per year than is slightly shorter than the Gregorian calendar, which is why the Holy Month of Ramadan (and all Islamic Holy days) cycle through the Gregorian or Civil calendar year, shifting back by about 10 days each year.

The Hebrew calendar (a luni-solar calendar) sets observances and cycles for Judaism. Relative to the Gregorian calendar, dates and holidays shift year to year but remain

within the same season. This is why the Jewish high holidays always happen in fall and Passover in spring.

Hindu and Buddhist calendars are also luni-solar. Each luni-solar calendar has different ways of keeping their months aligned with the seasons of the solar year, while specific dates fluctuate relative to the solar calendar within those seasons.

Time and days are measured differently across traditions. The Hebrew and Hijri calendars, among others, mark the start of a new day at sundown. This is why Jewish and Muslim holidays start at sundown the night before. The Western calendar marks a new day based on the clock, not moon patterns, but you see vestiges of earlier ways of marking time in, for example, New Year's Eve.

Traditions

There is great diversity in how religions are practiced and observed. It can feel complex if we aim to treat “all religions” equally; as practices are unique. If we strive to be equitable, it is important that our literacy of worldviews informs our practices, with a full understanding of the diversity of celebrations across traditions. Shifting our mindset will move us toward building the Inclusive community we desire at Macalester. Here are a few categories of practice that you should be attentive to:

- **Fasting:** A spiritual practice of abstaining from particular behaviors or foods. This may include fasting from food, intercourse, social-vices, designated foods, etc. Fasts are for a season or a prescribed day. Practices vary from person to person and exemptions or alternative practices are common - across traditions - for people who are elderly, sick, pregnant, menstruating, or would face undue burden.
- **Work Restriction:** an expectation (or religious obligation) not to work. This may include being in a workplace, driving, writing or drawing, cooking, using technology or electricity, attending class, completing homework or job tasks. People whose practice includes work restrictions vary, even within the same tradition.
- **Special Worship & Festival:** A special service, day, or series of days are reasonable to expect when a holy day is upon us. Some are time-bound to specific days or hours, while others offer a range of flexibility across cultural and

religious seasons; some are consistent across practitioners of a tradition, while others vary with the particularities of practice in family/cultural traditions; some may be performed alone, while others require a gathering of community some require travel time on either side, and many require preparation.

- Sabbath: Days, seasons and years of rest with deeper engagement in community or contemplative practice have origins in sacred traditions. Sabbath practices vary from one day a week to a full Sabbatical year. Rest for its own sake is counter-cultural in our context of Western capitalism, but has been central to resistance practices framed in religious language for millenia. Have a sabbatical coming? Thank world religions.

Calendar

In short, there is no one-size fits all approach to implementing inclusive practices that support the fullness of religious and spiritual expressions found in our community. Which is why a one-page calendar is limited in its usefulness. Our goal in providing you with a calendar is to lift up dates and observances that we can reasonably expect to restrict sizable portions of our students, staff and faculty from participation in community life. Linked is our [Religious Holy Days Calendar](#). You will notice these strongly favor Christian, Jewish and Muslim observances. This reflects the sizable populations of these communities at Macalester.

Resources to support Interfaith awareness & competency

Please receive this as an invitation to learn more about how you can be an inclusive partner. To increase your own religious literacy, here are some helpful resources: Please note that print resources are available from the CRSL on a limited basis.

Contact [Pattie Lydon](#)

- [A Multifaith Calendar: Building Our Future Together](#) - *available by request*
- Digital Calendar: [Harvard Divinity School](#) offers comprehensive dates and descriptions
- About World Religions: [The Pluralism Project](#) at Harvard
- Resource/Reference Text: *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*, edited by Matkins and Magida - *available by request*

Practices for implementation

Here are some things you can do as a professor, classmate, colleague and supervisor

- Name worldview and religious/spiritual practice as something you support.
- Support the practice of individuals not religions. This means, not all people of one tradition observe in the same way, so don't make assumptions. You can ask folks what they need.
- Be mindful in your scheduling. Avoid religious holidays for major departmental events, conferences, student organization events, exams, and significant required in-class work. *Undue burden or exclusion should not be the outcome of thoughtful inclusive planning.*
- Be sensitive. Launching a campaign, sharing important communication, or providing a limited window of time to respond (or submit) might overlap with a day when people will be occupied with religious observance. Expanded timelines and individual flexibility are more inclusive practices.
- Support and affirm. We don't ask you to stop your work on important days, but we do ask you to adapt. Here are some things you can do:
 - Record class or meetings on days when students and colleagues are not present.
 - Be sensitive and flexible; provide clear and consistent support.
- Consult! If you need guidance, clarity or consultation the Chaplains of the CRSL are available to you as a resource and love to think things through together!

As we seek to honor the fullness of each other's humanity, it is important that we offer each other - and ourselves - grace. We will make missteps, and can learn from them. We will grow, be stretched and challenged, and become more deeply humane together. What more might we expect from a community of learners? Thank you for honoring this important dimension of life for and with each other.

Sincerely,

The Center for Religious and Spiritual Life Team