

The Calendar of Religious Festivals and Supplement

2021

The Catholic Institute of Education's Religious Education Department makes the **Calendar of Religious Festivals** and the **Supplement to the Calendar of Religious Festivals** available to schools as a resource for planning assembly programs and Religious Education in relation to Life Orientation, other learning areas, the life of faith communities, and issues that face South Africa and the world. We hope that you can use the **Calendar** and its **Supplement** to encourage ecumenical and interfaith sensitivity, a strong concern for human rights – for children, adults, the disabled, and the displaced – and a passionate care for the environment.

The **Calendar** contains a selection of the most important celebrations in Christianity and several world religions. Note, however, that:

- the Orthodox plan their liturgical year slightly differently to the Catholic and Protestant Churches.
- Jewish, Muslim, and Bahá'í days begin at sundown on the evening before the given date.

No entries for African Traditional Religious practices are included in the **Calendar**. First, rituals are practiced within the family or local community as needed rather than at an appointed time. Second, while major festivals are linked to the agricultural cycle of planting and harvesting, the dates of these are uncertain until such time as they are announced by a monarch or chief. So, you will need to find out when events of local or regional significance are scheduled if you wish to refer to them.

The **Supplement** largely lists secular days of observance, declared by the South African State, the African Union, or the United Nations Organization, that relate to the environmental, health, human rights, social justice, and peace-keeping challenges that face us all. More information on UN observances is available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/observances/united-nations-observances/> Here, links to days, weeks, years, and decades can be found. In addition, please consider how your school can cultivate awareness around the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The document, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, can be found at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

The United Nations has declared 2021 as the International Year of Peace and Trust, the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, and the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables.

Feedback on the calendar is welcome. Comments can be sent to:

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Calendar of Religious Festivals 2021

JANUARY

1	Mary, Mother of God (New Year 2021 AD)	CATHOLIC
6	Epiphany Celebrated in the Catholic Church in South Africa on Sunday, 3/1/2021.	CHRISTIAN
24	Sunday of the Word of God	CATHOLIC

FEBRUARY

8	Parinirvana The solemn observance of the death of the Buddha's earthly form and his entrance into nirvana.	BUDDHIST
17	Ash Wednesday Orthodox Christians begin Lent on 15 March – Clean Monday.	CHRISTIAN
26	Purim A festival commemorating the events recounted in the Book of Esther - how the Jews of the Persian Empire were saved from the designs of the villainous Haman.	JEWISH

MARCH

11	Maha Shivaratri Great Shiva Night. A festival honouring the marriage of Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati.	HINDU
20	Naw-Rúz: New Year 178 BE The date is calculated according to the vernal equinox and linked with the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh – Tehran.	BAHÁ'Í
28-4/4	Pesach (Passover) Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorating the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt.	JEWISH
28-2/4	Holy Week (Inclusive of Palm Sunday and Good Friday)	CHRISTIAN
29	Holi A joyous spring festival including pilgrimage to holy places to offer penance for misdeeds, and to make or renew vows.	HINDU

APRIL

4	Easter Sunday Orthodox Christians will celebrate Easter on 2 May.	CHRISTIAN
13-21	Ramayan Week & Rama Navami A 9 day period during which the Ramayana, a Hindu epic, is read. It ends with Rama Navami, a festival celebrating the birth of Lord Rama.	HINDU
14	Ramadan The first day of the month of fasting.	MUSLIM
20	1 Ridván The first day of a twelve day period commemorating the last days of Bahá'u'lláh prior to his exile. It was during this time that Bahá'u'lláh made his first public declaration of his mission.	BAHÁ'Í

MAY

8	Lailatul Qadr (26 Ramadan) The Night of Power on which the Qur'an descended from heaven. It marks the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad's ministry.	MUSLIM
13	Ascension of Jesus Celebrated in the Catholic Church in South Africa on the following Sunday (16/5/2021).	CHRISTIAN
14-22	Novena of Prayer for Christian Unity The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference commends the time between Ascension and Pentecost. Material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is developed by local ecumenical partners, edited by Catholic Church and World Council of Churches representatives, and jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.	CATHOLIC
14	Eid-ul-Fitr (1 Shawwaal) The end of Ramadan, and the breaking of the fast.	MUSLIM
17-18	Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) The occasion on which Moses received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai.	JEWISH
23	Pentecost	CHRISTIAN

26	Vesak The full-moon feast in May, celebrated by Theravada Buddhists to commemorate the birth, the enlightenment, and the death of the Buddha. These three events are celebrated separately by Mahayana Buddhists in April, December and February.	BUDDHIST
30	Trinity Sunday	CHRISTIAN
JULY		
21	Eid-al-Adha (10-12 Zul Hijjah) The Festival of Sacrifice commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, at Allah's command and coincides with the end of the Hajj - the pilgrimage to Mecca. The sacrifice, made with either sheep, cow, or camel depending on the portions required, can be carried out on this or on one of the following two days.	MUSLIM
AUGUST		
6	Transfiguration	CHRISTIAN
10	Al Hijrah (New Year, 1443 AH, 1 Muharram) Marks the arrival of the Prophet and followers at Medina (Al Hijra) and the establishment of the 1 st Muslim State.	MUSLIM
15	Assumption of Mary	CATHOLIC
23-30	Gita Week & Krishna Janmashtami The Bhagavad Gita is read up to, and including, Krishna Janmashtami, birthday of Lord Krishna.	HINDU
SEPTEMBER		
1	World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation Introduced by Pope Francis I, 6 August 2015, as a call to protect God's handiwork, and an ecumenical gesture to this Orthodox Churches' observation. Many World Council of Churches' members have followed the Orthodox lead, too.	CATHOLIC / ORTHODOX
7-8	Rosh Hashanah (New Year 5782) Literally 'the head of the year'. Commemorates God's creation of the world.	JEWISH
16	Yom Kippur The Day of Atonement, considered the holiest day of the year.	JEWISH
21-22	Sukkot The Feast of Tabernacles commemorating the 40 years in the desert when the Israelites lived in shelters.	JEWISH
29	Simchat Torah 'Rejoicing over the Torah' - the completion (of Deuteronomy) and beginning (of Genesis) of the annual cycle of readings from the Torah.	JEWISH
OCTOBER		
7-14	Navaratri The festival of 'nine nights' honouring the mother goddess, Durga, wife of Shiva, and seeking her blessings.	HINDU
19	Mawlid an-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Mohamed, 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal) The Sunni date; Shia Muslims celebrate this 5 days later.	MUSLIM
NOVEMBER		
1	All Saints' Day The traditional date. Celebrated in the Catholic Church in South Africa on the following Sunday (7/11/2021).	CATHOLIC
4-8	Diwali (Deepavali) The Festival of Lights: Lakshmi, the Goddess of good fortune visits every house where a lamp is lit.	HINDU
7	Birth of Bahá'u'lláh Celebrates the birth, in 1817, of the founder of the Bahá'í faith.	BAHÁ'Í
14	World Day of the Poor	CATHOLIC
28	First Sunday of Advent	CHRISTIAN
29-6/12	Hanukkah The Festival of Lights celebrating the victory of Judas Maccabeus and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BCE.	JEWISH
DECEMBER		
8	Bodhi Day (Rohatsu) Mahayana Buddhists recall how Siddhartha Gautama was meditating under the peepal or banyan tree at the hour of dawn and experienced enlightenment (<i>Bodhi</i>) – seeing into the nature of suffering and how to be liberated from it.	BUDDHIST
25	Christmas Orthodox Christians will celebrate Christmas on 7 January, 2022.	CHRISTIAN

Supplement to the Calendar of Religious Festivals 2021

FEBRUARY

- 2 World Wetlands Day (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, signed on 2 February 1971.) UNITED NATIONS
21 International Mother Language Day UNITED NATIONS

MARCH

- 15-22 National Water Week / World Water Day (22nd) SOUTH AFRICAN / UNITED NATIONS
21 Human Rights Day (Also marks the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.) SOUTH AFRICAN
24 World TB Day UNITED NATIONS

APRIL

- 3 First meeting of the International Court of Justice in Hague in 1946
7 World Health Day (Also marks founding of the World Health Organization in 1948.) UNITED NATIONS
5 Family Day SOUTH AFRICAN
27 Freedom Day SOUTH AFRICAN

MAY

- 1 St. Joseph the Worker / Workers' Day CATHOLIC / INTERNATIONAL
9 Mother's Day SOUTH AFRICAN
21 World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development UNITED NATIONS
22 International Day for Biological Diversity UNITED NATIONS
25 Africa Freedom Day AFRICAN
30-6/6 Child Protection Week SOUTH AFRICAN

JUNE

- 5 World Environment Day UNITED NATIONS
16 Youth Day / Day of the African Child SOUTH AFRICAN / UNITED NATIONS
20 Father's Day SOUTH AFRICAN
17 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought UNITED NATIONS
20 Africa Refugee Day / World Refugee Day AFRICAN / UNITED NATIONS

AUGUST

- 9 National Women's Day SOUTH AFRICAN
30-5/9 National Arbor Week SOUTH AFRICAN

SEPTEMBER

- 16 International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer UNITED NATIONS
21 International Day of Peace UNITED NATIONS
24 Heritage Day SOUTH AFRICAN

OCTOBER

- 1 International Day of Older Persons UNITED NATIONS
4 World Habitat Day UNITED NATIONS
5 World Teachers' Day UNITED NATIONS
11-17 National Marine Week SOUTH AFRICAN
16 World Food Day UNITED NATIONS
17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty UNITED NATIONS
24 United Nations Day (Founded 24 June, 1945; UN Charter signed on 26 June.) UNITED NATIONS

NOVEMBER

- 20 Universal Children's Day UNITED NATIONS
25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women UNITED NATIONS
(Marks the beginning of a 16 day period of action to address gendered patterns of exploitation and violence.)

DECEMBER

- 1 World AIDS Day UNITED NATIONS
3 International Day of Disabled Persons UNITED NATIONS
16 Day of Reconciliation SOUTH AFRICAN