

The Calendar of Religious Festivals and Supplement

2023

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 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; some Hindu observances have activities that begin on the evening preceding 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/>

Three longer occasions or processes you might like to explore further during 2023 are:

- The Catholic Church Synod 2021-2023 that concludes in October this year. An outline of the process and the available documentation to date can be found at: <https://www.synod.va/en.html>
- The UN International Year of Millets that brings attention to an important food source in Africa and Asia. An introduction can be found at: <https://www.fao.org/millets-2023>
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals outlined in *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that can be found at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

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

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Calendar of Religious Festivals 2023

JANUARY

1	Mary, Mother of God (New Year 2023 AD)	CATHOLIC
8	Epiphany	CATHOLIC
22	Sunday of the Word of God	CATHOLIC

FEBRUARY

15	Parinirvana Mahayana Buddhists mark the solemn observance of the death of the Buddha's earthly form and his entrance into nirvana.	BUDDHIST
18	Maha Shivaratri Great Shiva Night. A festival honouring the marriage of Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati.	HINDU
22	Ash Wednesday Orthodox Christians begin Lent on 27 February – Clean Monday.	CHRISTIAN

MARCH

7	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
7	Holi A joyous spring festival including pilgrimage to holy places to offer penance for misdeeds, and to make or renew vows.	HINDU
21	Naw-Rúz: New Year 180 BE The date is calculated according to the vernal equinox and linked with the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh – Tehran.	BAHÁ'Í
24	Ramadan The first day of the month of fasting.	MUSLIM
22-30	Ramayana 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

APRIL

2-7	Holy Week (Inclusive of Palm Sunday and Good Friday)	CHRISTIAN
6-12	Pesach (Passover) Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorating the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt.	JEWISH
9	Easter Sunday Orthodox Christians will celebrate Easter on 16 April.	CHRISTIAN
18	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
22	Eid-ul-Fitr (1 Shawwaal) The end of Ramadan, and the breaking of the fast.	MUSLIM
22	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

18	Ascension of Jesus Celebrated in the Catholic Church in South Africa on the following Sunday (21/5/2023).	CHRISTIAN
19-27	Prayer for Christian Unity The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference commends the time between Ascension and Pentecost. Material for eight days of prayer 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.	ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN
26-7	Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) The occasion on which Moses received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai.	JEWISH
28	Pentecost	CHRISTIAN

JUNE

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| 2 | 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 |
| 4 | Trinity Sunday | CHRISTIAN |
| 29 | 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 |

JULY

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| 20 | Al Hijrah (New Year, 1445 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 |
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AUGUST

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| 6 | Transfiguration | CHRISTIAN |
| 20 | Assumption of Mary | CATHOLIC |
| 30-6/9 | Gita Week & Krishna Janmashtami
The Bhagavad Gita is read up to, and including, Krishna Janmashtami, birthday of Lord Krishna. This is the date for Smarta lineages; Vaishnavite lineages celebrate a day later. | HINDU |

SEPTEMBER

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| 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 |
| 16-17 | Rosh Hashanah (New Year 5784)
Literally 'the head of the year'. Commemorates God's creation of the world. | JEWISH |
| 25 | Yom Kippur
The Day of Atonement, considered the holiest day of the year. | JEWISH |
| 28 | Mawlid an-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Mohamed, 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal)
The Sunni date; Shia Muslims celebrate this 5 days later. | MUSLIM |
| 30-1/10 | Sukkot
The Feast of Tabernacles commemorating the 40 years in the desert when the Israelites lived in shelters. | JEWISH |

OCTOBER

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| 8 | Simchat Torah
'Rejoicing over the Torah' - the completion (of Deuteronomy) and beginning (of Genesis) of the annual cycle of readings from the Torah. | JEWISH |
| 15-23 | Navaratri
The festival of 'nine nights' honouring the mother goddess, Durga, wife of Shiva, and seeking her blessings. | HINDU |
| 17 | Birth of Bahá'u'lláh
Celebrates the birth, in 1817, of the founder of the Bahá'í faith. | BAHÁ'Í |

NOVEMBER

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| 5 | All Saints' Day | CATHOLIC |
| 12 | Diwali (Deepavali)
The Festival of Lights: Lakshmi, the Goddess of good fortune, visits every house where a lamp is lit. Diwali is the 3 rd day of a 5-day festival. | HINDU |
| 19 | World Day of the Poor | CATHOLIC |

DECEMBER

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| 3 | First Sunday of Advent | CHRISTIAN |
| 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 |
| 8-15 | Hanukkah
The Festival of Lights celebrating the victory of Judas Maccabeus and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BCE. | JEWISH |
| 25 | Christmas
Orthodox Christians will celebrate Christmas on 7 January, 2024. | CHRISTIAN |

Supplement to the Calendar of Religious Festivals 2023

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

20-26	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
10	Family Day	SOUTH AFRICAN
27	Freedom Day	SOUTH AFRICAN

MAY

1	St. Joseph the Worker / Workers' Day	CATHOLIC / INTERNATIONAL
14	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
28-3/6	Child Protection Week	SOUTH AFRICAN

JUNE

5	World Environment Day	UNITED NATIONS
16	Youth Day / Day of the African Child	SOUTH AFRICAN / UNITED NATIONS
18	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
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SEPTEMBER

1-30	National Arbor Month	SOUTH AFRICAN
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

1-31	National Marine Month	SOUTH AFRICAN
1	International Day of Older Persons	UNITED NATIONS
6	World Habitat Day	UNITED NATIONS
5	World Teachers' Day	UNITED NATIONS
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 (Marks the beginning of a 16 day period of action to address gendered patterns of exploitation and violence.)	UNITED NATIONS

DECEMBER

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