

Georgetown University
Department of Campus Ministry
Religious Holy Days
2009

PRELIMINARY NOTES:

*Sunday is the Sabbath, or day of rest, in the **Christian** tradition. Many Christian denominations ask their members to refrain from unnecessary work on Sundays. **Roman Catholics** are obliged, on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, to attend Mass, which is offered at a variety of times in the chapels of the University and at Catholic parishes. According to church law, Catholics on Sundays and holy days "abstain from those works and affairs which hinder the worship to be rendered to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the suitable relaxation of mind and body."*

***Eastern Orthodox** Christians follow either the Julian or the Gregorian calendar. Thus, religious observances may vary among Eastern Orthodox Christians.*

***Jewish** holy days begin and end at sundown on the first and last days listed. The Jewish Sabbath occurs weekly and is the holiest day of the Jewish liturgical year. The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday evening and concludes on Saturday evening. It commemorates the seventh day of creation in the book of Genesis. Very traditional Jews do not perform any work during this time.*

***Muslim** holy days are calculated on a lunar calendar and are thus approximate. Muslims are mandated by the teachings of Islam to attend a prayer service every Friday, and are not allowed to attend to work-related issues during the time of the prayers. Friday prayer (or Jum'ah prayer) starts at 1:30 PM and end at 2:10 PM.*

Students may ask for travel time to return home for the beginning of religious observance.

January

- 1 **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God** is a holy day for Roman Catholics, who are obligated to attend Mass. The context for this religious celebration is the liturgical season of Christmas, a period of time for Christians to ponder the great religious mystery of God-among-us in Jesus Christ. Mary, specially chosen to be the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church, has an elevated place of honor in the Church's tradition. She is an esteemed intercessor, who draws us closer to the experience of salvation, which is deeper union with God and peace among us. In particular, Christians today pray for world peace as a gift of Mary's Son, the Prince of Peace.

- 7 **Christmas** for Eastern Orthodox Christians following the Julian calendar. See December 25 (below).
- 8 **‘Ashura fasting** occurs on the 9th, 10th and 11th of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. For the majority of Muslims, including Sunni Muslims, it is a form of gratitude to the Living God for having saved Moses and the Israelites from the tyranny of slavery in Egypt. For Shi’ah Muslims, it marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala when Imam Husayn ibn Ali, a grandson of the prophet Muhammad, was killed by forces considered to be oppressive.

February

- 25 **Ash Wednesday** begins the liturgical season of Lent in the Christian calendar by proclaiming a day of fasting and a period of repentance. The forty days of Lent are a time of spiritual renewal and preparation for the most solemn feast day in the Christian religion, Easter. Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting are traditional practices during Lent. On this day, many Christians will participate in a Church prayer service expressing their hope in God’s mercy and their need for help to overcome sin. The faithful receive ashes on the forehead as a sign of how they are creatures – not God. The ashes also announce their acceptance of the gospel and their commitment to reform their lives.

March

- 2 **Lent** begins for Eastern Orthodox Christians.

April

- 8 **Erev Pesach** (Passover): The evening of this date marks the beginning of Passover for Jews. “Pesach” means “to pass over.” It refers to God’s “passing over” the houses of the children of Israel in their liberation from Egyptian slavery. No work can be performed after sundown on this date. Passover lasts eight days. The first two days and last two days are holy days, when no work is performed. Work can be performed during intermediate days.

April 9	Pesach I - no work performed
April 10	Pesach II - no work performed
April 15	Pesach VII - no work performed
April 16	Pesach VIII - no work performed

- 9 **Holy (or Maundy) Thursday** is the day Christians commemorate the “Last Supper” that Jesus Christ shared with his disciples. In many denominations, Christians gather in the evening to remember this meal. Some services include a

ritual of washing of feet, which imitates how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as a sign of his love and his commissioning them to serve. In Catholic and some Protestant traditions, this celebration is the beginning of the Easter Triduum, three holy days which mark the one, salvific event of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

- 10 **Good Friday** marks the day that Jesus Christ died on the cross. Many Christians gather in the afternoon or evening to hear the proclamation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture. At these services, they offer prayers for the needs of the Church and the world. Some Christian denominations venerate the cross as the great price paid for our salvation, and they experience communion with our Savior by eating the consecrated bread. As on Ash Wednesday, Roman Catholics fast and refrain from eating meat on this day.
- 11 **Holy Saturday** is a day of prayer and quiet for some Christian denominations, awaiting the Easter Vigil service, the beginning of the celebration of Easter Sunday. During the Easter Vigil liturgy, Christians joyfully celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the Easter Vigil, adults who are baptized in other faith traditions or have not been baptized are welcomed into the Church.
- 12 **Easter Sunday**, the most solemn holy day in the Christian calendar, celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus begins the Easter season, a fifty-day celebration to ponder the significance of the awesome mystery of the resurrection: how Christ conquered sin and death and invites us to share in the resurrection.

For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate sign of God's faithfulness to us and the assurance that death, violence, and despair will not have the last word. This is a time of great hope. As a season, Easter ends 50 days hence with the celebration of the Feast of **Pentecost**, the commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples and the founding of the Church. The Holy Spirit draws all Christians closer together and missions them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to serve others, especially those most in need.

- 17 **Holy Friday** for Eastern Orthodox Christians.
- 19 **Easter Sunday** ("Pascha") for Eastern Orthodox Christians.

May

- 24 **Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord** is a holy day of obligation for Roman Catholics marking the ascension of the risen Lord to the right hand of his Father in heaven. This comes forty days after Easter. This feast deepens the Christian's experience and understanding of the mystery of the resurrection. Jesus the Christ

lived two thousand years ago in space and time. As a consequence of the resurrection, Jesus Christ is no longer limited by space and time. As Son of God, Jesus overcomes the limits of space and time and is present to believers of every age.

- 28 **Erev Shavuot:** this Jewish holy day commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Shavuot is also known as Pentecost inasmuch as it is celebrated fifty days after Passover. The date of Shavuot is directly linked to that of Passover. On Passover, the Jewish people were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on Shavuot they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God. No work can be performed after sundown on this date.

May 29	Shavuot I - no work performed
May 30	Shavuot II - no work performed

August

- 15 **Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** is a feast day for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians following the Gregorian calendar. Roman Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. Over the centuries, the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has appreciated more and more the esteemed role of Mary in salvation history. As the mother of Jesus the Savior, she is known to have a unique relationship with the Christ. Principally, she is a powerful intercessor, drawing us into a deepened intimacy with the Divine and giving a profound courage in the face of death. A major teaching of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church is that Mary, because of her special role in salvation history, was taken directly to heaven at the time of her death, instilling hope in the hearts of Christians for the fulfillment of Christ's promise that those who die with him will rise with him.

- 21 **Ramadan** begins at sunset. This Muslim religious observance takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan, Muslims fast, not eating or drinking anything from sunrise to sunset. In their prayer, they ask for forgiveness from sins, practice self-discipline, and commit themselves to good deeds. Each day of fasting concludes with common prayer and a meal, *iftar*.

September

- 16 **Lailatul-Qadr** ("Night of Power"), celebrated during Ramadan, marks the anniversary of the night that the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the prophet Muhammad. Muslims also believe that on this night their fate in the

following year is determined. They thus pray fervently all night for God's mercy and salvation (in a practice called, *ehyaa*, or "revival").

- 18 **Erev Rosh Hashana**, a Jewish holiday commonly referred to as the "Jewish New Year." It is observed on the first day of Tishrei, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, as ordained in the Torah. Rosh Hashanah is the first of the High Holy Days or *Yamim Noraim* ("Days of Awe"), which are ten days specifically set aside to focus on repentance. They conclude with Yom Kippur, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. No work can be performed after sundown on this date.

September 19 Rosh Hashana, year 5770 - no work performed

September 20 Rosh Hashana (day 2) - no work performed

- 20 **Eid-al-Fitr**, often abbreviated as Eid, is the Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. *Eid* is an Arabic word meaning "festivity", while *Fitr* means "to break the fast." This holy day thus marks the breaking of the month-long fast of Ramadan.

- 27 **Erev Yom Kippur**, ("the Day of Atonement"), is the most solemn Jewish holiday. Its central themes are reflection, repentance and atonement. No work can be performed after sundown on this date. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services. Yom Kippur is the tenth and final day of the Ten Days of Repentance, which begin with Rosh Hashanah.

September 28 Yom Kippur - no work performed.

October

- 2 **Erev Sukkot** ("Feast of Booths" or "Feast of Tabernacles") is a Jewish biblical pilgrimage festival that occurs in autumn on the 15th day of the month of Tishrei. No work can be performed after sundown on this date. The holiday lasts seven days.

October 3 Sukkot - no work performed

October 4 Sukkot II (no work performed for traditional observance)

- 9 **Erev Shmini Atzeret** ("the Eighth day of Assembly") is a Jewish holiday celebrated on the 22nd day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. It is most notable for its prayer for rain, as it indicates the beginning of the rainy season in Israel. No work can be performed after sundown on this date.

October 10 Shmini Atzeret - no work performed

- 11 **Simchat Torah** is the Jewish holiday that celebrates the beginning of the new cycle of “Torah” (Five Books of Moses) readings. It is one of the most joyous holy days of the year. No work is performed on this holiday.

November

- 1 **Solemnity of All Saints** is a holy day when Roman Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. This feast celebrates holy men and women across the ages who have died and who now serve as models of Christian living. Because they enjoy life with God in heaven, the saints act as intercessors on our behalf, praying for us and encouraging us in the ordinary demands of everyday living. Christians profess a belief in the “communion of saints,” a conviction that the love of God, which knows no bounds, binds both the living and the dead in one family.
- 27-29 **Eid-UI-Adha**, the Feast of Sacrifice in the Muslim calendar, is observed after the *Hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. This Muslim observance (also known as Greater Eid) is the second most important festival in the Muslim calendar. It is traditionally a 1-3 day celebration.

December

- 8 **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception** is a holy day when Roman Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. Whereas the feast of the Assumption highlights the esteemed role of Mary in salvation history from the perspective of the end of her life, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception highlights Mary’s role from the perspective of the beginning of her life. As the mother of Jesus the Savior, she is known to have a unique relationship with the Christ. Principally, she is a powerful intercessor, inspiring us to have hearts ready for an encounter with God and to receive the grace to battle sin. A major teaching of the Catholic Church is that Mary was kept sinless from the first moment of her conception, instilling hope in the hearts of Christians for freedom from our sins and for freedom to do good deeds.
- 11-19 **Chanukah**, a relatively minor Jewish holiday, is also known as the Festival of Lights. Chanukah is an eight-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt of the 2nd century BCE. Jewish observance includes the lighting of a special candelabra called “*Chanukiah*,” which has eight branches. The holiday is a working holiday in its entirety.
- 25 **Christmas**, or the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: on this day, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox Christians who follow the Gregorian calendar celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to Mary

and Joseph in Bethlehem. This is a holy day of obligation for Catholics. Many Christians begin the celebration on Christmas Eve.

Liturgically speaking, Christmas triggers a festive season that extends until the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus in January. The belief that God becomes a human being in Jesus (also known as the Incarnation) is too great of a mystery to appropriate in one day, so Christians keep festival for a couple of weeks. Having received the wondrous gift of Jesus, the Savior from our sin and death, Christians respond by in turn giving gifts to loved ones and to the poor, so that the good news of the Savior's presence among us may draw all people more closely to God and to unity, peace, and justice within the human family.

- 28 **‘Ashura fasting** occurs on the 9th, 10th and 11th of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. For the majority of Muslims including Sunni Muslims, it is a form of gratitude to the Living God for having saved Moses and the Israelites from the tyranny of slavery in Egypt. For Shi'ah Muslims, it marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala when Imam Husayn ibn Ali, a grandson of the prophet Muhammad, was killed by forces considered to be oppressive.

Policy Accommodating Students' Religious Observances (effective the semester beginning January 2009)

Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday (see below) or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes. The Office of the Provost, in consultation with Campus Ministry and the Registrar, will publish, before classes begin for a given term, a list of major religious holidays likely to affect Georgetown students. The Provost and the Main Campus Executive Faculty encourage faculty to accommodate students whose bona fide religious observances in other ways impede normal participation in a course. Students who cannot be accommodated should discuss the matter with an advising dean.