

Interfaith Calendar Highlights

- December 8. **Bodhi Day** (Buddhism). Celebration of when Prince Gautama sat under the Bodhi tree and vowed to stay until he attained ultimate enlightenment.
- December 12 or 14. **Mawlid al-Nabi** (Islam). Birthday of the prophet Muhammad. (Different dates for Sunni and Shia Muslims.)
- December 21. **Solstice/Yule** (Wiccan/Christian). The beginning of winter and rebirth of the sun. Some Christians also celebrate it as the light of Christ coming into the world.
- December 25. **Christmas Day** (Christian). Beginning of 12-day celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.
- December 25-January 1. **Hanukkah** (Jewish). Festival of Lights commemorating the Maccabean rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165 BCE.

Source: <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org>

Cultural & Religious Celebrations during Winter

by Chaplain Chris Brown

Most of us are used to celebrating the holidays during the fall and winter, as several important holidays fall during this time of year. For Christians, **Christmas** commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, whom Christians hold to be the Son of God and savior of mankind. While no one knows the exact day of Jesus' birth, Christmas has fallen on December 25th since the days



of the early church. Christians typically attend special worship services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Gift-giving, singing special songs ("carols"), and having a large family feast have also become part of the holiday celebration. In some Christian traditions, the holiday lasts several days after Christmas Day.

For Jews, **Hanukkah** commemorates the victory of the revolt in Israel against the Greek ruler Antiochus IV, who severely persecuted Jews in the 2nd century B.C.E. Antiochus attempted to force the Jews to adopt pagan rites in their worship and practice, prompting the family of Mattathias ben Yohanan (who later gained the nickname "Maccabees") to organize a revolt. Hanukkah lasts eight days, during which Jews exchange gifts and light a *menorah* (a nine-branched candlestick) in memory of the ancient Jews' victory over their persecutors.



For Muslims, the celebration of the prophet Muhammad's birthday, **Mawlid al-Nabi**, may fall during the fall and winter months. Because Muslims observe a lunar calendar, the holiday occurs at different times in different years. In 2016 Mawlid al-Nabi falls on December 12th or 14th. The month-long Muslim holiday **Ramadan**, the commemoration of the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad, may also occur in the fall or winter, depending on the Muslim calendar. In 2016, Ramadan was observed in June and July.



Kwanzaa, which means "first fruits" celebrates African culture and heritage. During each day of the weeklong observance, celebrants light a candle representing a distinct value or ethic of African culture (unity, responsibility, self-determination, collective work, cooperative economics, purpose, and creativity). The holiday features storytelling about the seven core principles. In addition to food, the celebration also may include dancing, poetry and music. Gift giving and a large feast also accompany Kwanzaa celebrations.



The winter holidays are much more than shopping and spending money. These holidays hold profound spiritual and cultural meaning for people in the United States, around the world and here at MUSC Health, including our patients and their families and care team members.

Here's hoping that we will seek out opportunities to explore and experience the rich diversity of holidays this winter season!

Did you know?

Each year, 30-35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States and trees usually grow for about 15 years before they are sold.

This publication provides information about the diverse patients served by MUSC Health. It introduces different cultures and communication strategies in order to foster greater respect and understanding in the delivery of culturally competent care. No generalizations about individuals should be made since all individuals differ. *This special edition highlights one tradition/celebration of one country on each continent.*

Fall/Winter Holiday Celebrations Around the World

ASIA

Chinese New Year is an important festival that is celebrated at the turn of the traditional lunisolar Chinese calendar. The evening preceding the first day of the Chinese New Year families gather for an annual reunion dinner. It is also traditional for every family to thoroughly clean their homes in order to sweep away any ill-fortune.



The holiday is celebrated by adorning girls in long white gowns and red sashes with wreaths on their heads.

AUSTRALIA



In Australia, Christmas comes near the beginning of the summer, as a result the words to Christmas Carols about snow and the cold winter are sometimes changed to special Australian words. There are also huge Christmas pageants in each state capital city that are broadcast across the country. Most towns and cities have festivals and parades.

SOUTH/CENTRAL AMERICA

Many people of Latino culture celebrate Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) during the month of November. As celebrated in Mexico, people visit cemeteries to be with the souls of the departed and may build private altars containing the favorite foods and beverages of the deceased. Also, many people bring photos and memorabilia of the departed. The intent of this holiday is to encourage visits from the souls of the deceased. Families hope that the souls would hear the prayers and the comments of the living.



NORTH AMERICA

Canada is a large country with people of many different cultural backgrounds. Because of this, there are a variety of Christmas traditions in Canada. Many of the traditions and celebrations come from French, English, Irish, Scottish, German influences. On the south shore of Nova Scotia, there's the tradition of Belsnickeling where people dress up in funny Santa costumes and go from house to house until the home-owners guess who they are. The Belsnicklers often bring musical instruments and sing.



AFRICA



Ethiopia, and especially the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, use the old Julian calendar, as such they celebrate Christmas on January 7th, not December 25th. The Christmas celebration in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is called Ganna. Most people go to church on Christmas day and many people fast on

Christmas Eve (January 6th). At dawn on Ganna, people get dressed in white and may wear a traditional garment called a shamma.

ANTARTICA

South Pole Station rings in the New Year with a solemn and meticulous ceremony to adjust the South Pole. The Pole is atop an ice sheet that moves slightly every year, so the marker for the South Pole drifts somewhat—about 30 feet every year. The location of the Pole is surveyed on January first, and a new marker is installed, with the flags rearranged around it. Almost everyone at the station attends the ceremony



EUROPE

St. Lucia Day, as celebrated in Sweden, honors a 13th century saint. St. Lucia was a girl who would secretly bring food to persecuted Christians in Rome, who lived in hiding in the catacombs under the city.



These holiday celebrations depict the richness of human experiences and simultaneously provides us with an introductory script to help us begin to engage our colleagues and patients. Engage! Educate! Enjoy!

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