
On Earth Peace
AGAPE
HOLIDAYS
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Dear Reader

We've reached that time of year when there's a chill in the air and yellow leaves are falling off the trees. Maybe some of our neighbors' houses are even twinkling with Christmas lights.

I live in California and unfortunately our palm trees don't change colors. In fact, it's warm enough to go swim at the beach! Still, pumpkins, turkeys, and cinnamon scented candles are popping up left and right. We are entering into what many people call "the holiday season."

But what is a holiday? Why are some days thought of as more special than others? Why do people participate in different holidays?

These are big and important questions. In this issue of AGAPE, we will explore the "why" behind holidays. We will also dive into the complex, heavy history behind certain holidays and wonder together about what this means for us as peacebuilders.

It's true - we are in the holiday season. And yes, that means more cozy blankets and tasty treats. **It also means we have more time to intentionally focus on our personal values and the values of our community.** So grab a cup of cocoa and let's start learning!

Peace, Aliah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Table of Contents

3 What is a Holiday?

4 Holidays in Ethiopia

5 Create & Reflect

6 Practicing Power-With

7 Invent Your Own Holiday

8 Esther Day

9 Learning New Traditions

10 Book Nook

11 Christian Calendar

12 Meet the Authors

What is a Holiday?

By Aliah

The dictionary defines holiday as "a day where you don't have to work." It's true – most of us think of holidays as time off from school. This can add to our excitement because it means you can rest & do fun activities. However, this single definition doesn't provide a full picture.

A holiday isn't just time off from your usual responsibilities – it's about what you DO with that free time. Why do we have a winter break? To play with our presents and sleep in? Perhaps there is something deeper at play.

A holiday is a specific time in the year we intentionally set aside to honor something of value to us. We value different things and honor them in different ways depending on our culture, faith, and identity.

For example, many people in the United States celebrate the value of gratitude on Thanksgiving. They honor gratitude by sharing a meal with family members and expressing thanks around the table.

Alternatively, indigenous communities carry a very different relationship with Thanksgiving. Its origins lie in European colonizers stealing native land and taking away their way of life through violence and disease.

For this reason, Thanksgiving can also be a day set aside to value the memory of those harmed by colonization. **In this context, honoring may not look like celebration. Instead, it can be a day to grieve, reflect, or learn about indigenous history.**

Imagine a fireplace. In order to keep the fire going, you need to add wood every now and then. This takes time and intention. **The fire is your values and the values of your culture and community. Holidays and their traditions are the wood we give to keep that fire alive.**

You don't have to attend school, but that doesn't mean there's no work to do. Creating space in our calendar to recognize what's important is part of being peace builders.

So . . . holidays may not actually be a day off. But that's a good thing! Instead, it's a day to gather around the fireplace to remember and reflect with your community, enjoy the warmth, and keep it going.



Holidays in Ethiopia

By Rodas

I used to celebrate holidays with my family and friends in Ethiopia. When I moved away to the United States for college, I wasn't able to celebrate them the same way. I realized these holidays were important to me. After moving back home, I have become more passionate about observing the holidays I once overlooked.

The feeling of a holiday, whether it is a religious or public holiday, is special. Even when it's a holiday that my muslim neighbors celebrate, such as Eid al-fitr (a holiday marking the end of the Ramadan fasting season), I would still feel the festivities because they knocked on our door and shared holiday sweets and snacks with us.

In Ethiopia, we follow the Ethiopian calendar which is different because it's 7-8 years behind the Gregorian calendar many follow in the United States. We celebrate Enkutatash (New Year's Day) on September 11th or Meskerem 1st (the first month of our year). My favorite holiday is Meskele, which translates to "The Cross" and its eve Demera which translates to "Unify or To Gather".

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian religion, **Meskele is a day to remember the finding of the true cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified.** The story goes that a queen dreamt she found the cross. She then gathered her followers and lit a fire and its smoke led them in the direction of where the cross lay.



On Demera, we gather to light a big bonfire, sing songs, eat and dance together late into the night. 20 years ago, when my family and I first moved to our neighborhood we celebrated with only 5 families. This year, 200 of us gathered including a 2 year old and a 90 year old neighbor.

Although Meskele/Demera is a Christian tradition, the celebrations are open to anyone in the areas. Over the years, this holiday has allowed my neighbors and my family to foster a close relationship. Some of my favorite childhood memories are from preparing for and celebrating the holiday with my neighborhood friends. The delicious food is also a huge plus!

I love this holiday because it allows all of us to come together, break bread and catch up on what we have missed in each others' lives.

Other public holidays include The Adwa Victory Celebration, which remembers the successful resistance of Ethiopians against Italian colonization and the Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and People's holiday - a celebration of cultural diversity and the equal rights of all ethnic groups in the country.

Both of these holidays highlight the importance of freedom and mutual respect for everyone. They are somewhat observed in Ethiopia but we have yet to grasp their purpose and collectively practice the values that both holidays represent. I hope they gain more wide-spread recognition in the future.

Create & Reflect

What do you imagine when you read the word: "**HOLIDAY**"? Draw what comes to mind in the space below!

Reflection: How many holidays are represented in your drawings? Who participates in those holidays? Spoiler alert: the answer isn't everyone!

Practicing Power-With

By Ewan

Have you ever had to celebrate a holiday that you didn't want to celebrate, or in a way that you didn't like? While holidays can be meaningful and fun , that doesn't mean the way your community celebrates or why they celebrate matches your values. Luckily, you have the ability to change that.

Have you ever heard of *power?* Sometimes, we think of power as a bad thing, but at the end of the day, **power is just the ability to change something in your life**. You have power in knowing a lot about something, or you have power in being a leader at school.

Power also exists between our relationships. Your parents are able to make decisions for you because they have the job to care for you. But relationships aren't just one-way. You have power, too! You can use this power to change the way that you celebrate or even the meaning of why you're celebrating.

A lot of people think that having power means that you can do whatever you want to other people. This is called *power over*, and this use of power typically hurts other people or makes them feel stuck. There's another kind of power that lifts people up and can lead to better situations for everyone.

This is called *power with*. Instead of doing things just for yourself and by yourself, *power with* someone likely leads to success and helping the most people possible.

Here's an example: What do you think of whenever you get ready to celebrate the Fourth of July? I almost always think of fireworks. Fireworks are pretty, but they are loud and hurtful to friends and animals with sensitive ears.

Every year, flocks of birds flee their nests and even die due to the noise. The people hosting the fireworks have power because they are running the event. They might not listen to your request to stop the firework show. However, you can use your power-with in a different way.

Instead of watching fireworks and leaving your friend by themself, you find another activity to do with your friends. As a group, talk about getting sparklers. Sparklers are also pretty and fun, but aren't as loud. **In that moment, you're using the power of your relationship with your community to advocate for a better option for your friend. What other creative ways can you use power with to bring about helpful change?**

This year, I didn't feel much like celebrating the Fourth of July. Celebrating America can be hard because the country is not a safe place for everyone. Some kids don't have all of their family in one place because of the unjust ways America treats immigrants. Other kids may have grieving family members who were killed in the many wars America participates in. Holding space for these hard things may mean celebrating the Fourth of July in a different way or not at all.

Here's a fun secret: holidays are all made up! This means you can use your power, *power with* your friends, to celebrate anything, in any way you can imagine.

Invent Your Own Holiday

STEP ONE:

What do you care about? List anything that comes to mind!

STEP TWO:

Choose one topic from that list.

STEP THREE:

What is the intention of your holiday? In other words, how do you recognize & honor your topic?

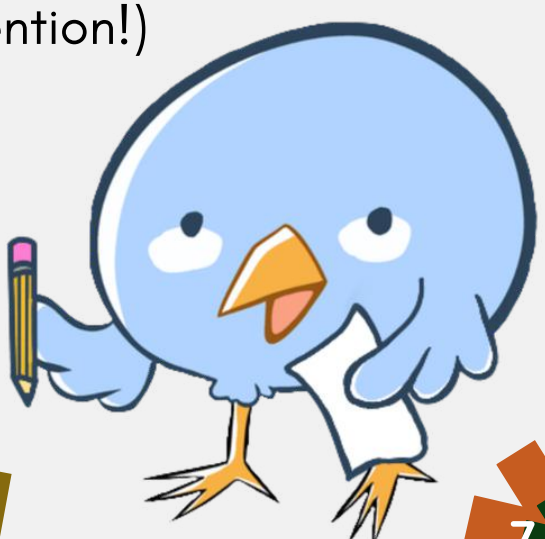
- ☐ Celebrate
- ☐ Reflect
- ☐ Hope
- ☐ Grieve

STEP FOUR:

What do you do on this special day?
(Make sure it's related to your intention!)

STEP FIVE:

Pick a date!



Esther Day

Every year, on August 3rd, a community of people online known as “Nerdfighteria” celebrate Esther Day. This is a holiday created by a 16 year old girl named Esther Earl who wanted there to be a day where non-romantic love was appreciated. A day when we stop and say “I love you” to our friends, family, neighbors, and pets. Esther passed away a few weeks after creating this holiday due to cancer. Youtubers John & Hank Green continue to celebrate & spread the word about Esther day as a way to honor her memory & all the different ways love shows up in our lives.

Scan the QR below if you want to learn more about Esther day from John Green! We encourage you to watch until the 1:00 minute mark. After then, the video promotes donations to “Project Lovely”, a cause On Earth Peace is not associated with.

Learning New Traditions

By Jasmine

How can kids learn more about different holidays & their histories?

During this time of year, people all around the world gather together. For some, this may look like decorating Christmas trees, exchanging presents, and cozying up with a holiday movie. Others might celebrate by cleaning their homes or lighting oil lamps to attract good fortune.

No matter your background, the holiday season is something that can be enjoyed by everyone. It offers a chance to reflect on the past year by reconnecting with loved ones through shared traditions.

Although some of these traditions might look similar, such as lighting candles or preparing a big feast, their origins often look very different. Maybe you learned about the history of your holidays from songs and stories taught in school or passed down through generations.

Still, it never hurts to do a little more research. In fact, as peacebuilders we should know the history behind our traditions to make sure we're participating in practices that value justice and love of neighbor.

With over 10,000 religions around the world, there are so many different ways that people celebrate. Some communities even celebrate their holidays in the spring and summer, as opposed to fall and winter. For example, while January 1st is often seen as New Year's Day here in the United States, many cultures don't start their new year until February or even June.

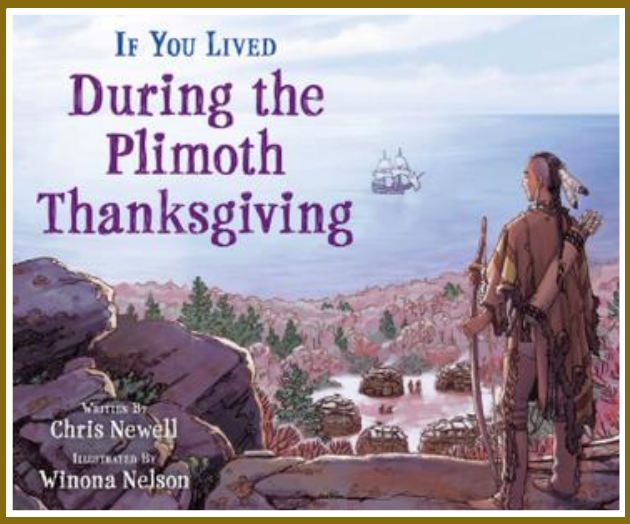
Some of the ways you can learn more about all the different holidays and their histories are by reading and asking questions! Libraries are a great place to start if you want to do your own research. Librarians at your school or local library are always ready to point you toward the perfect book!

Alternatively, maybe you know someone personally whose holiday traditions look a little different than yours — don't be afraid to ask and learn more. Who knows? You might even be invited to a celebration!

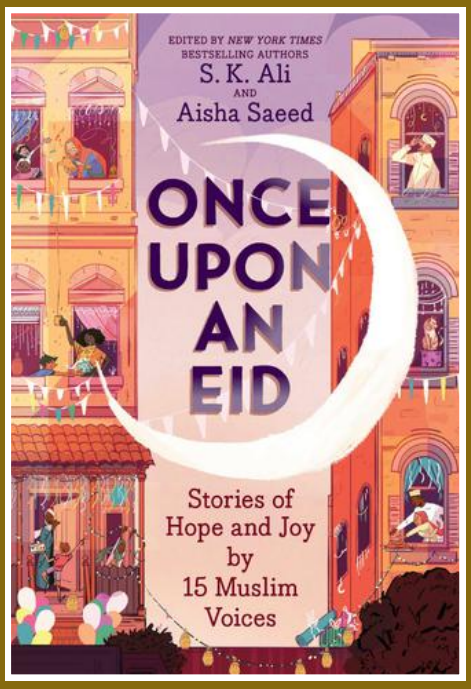
Being open to learning about new holidays can open the door to new experiences. At the same time, being open to learning more about holidays you're already familiar with is also very important. You might develop a greater appreciation for your own family's traditions, or find that next year you want to try something different.



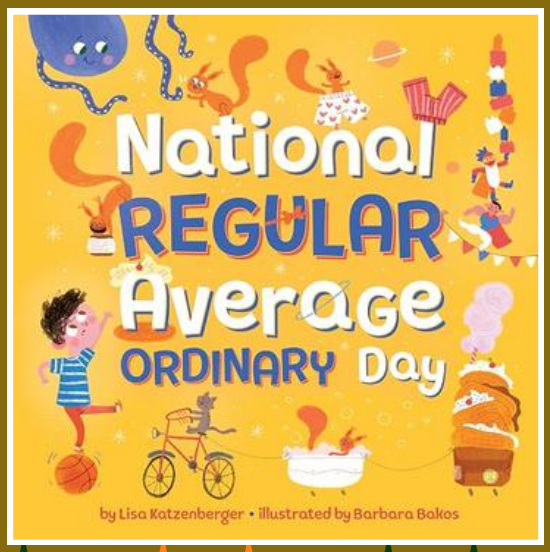
Book Nook



If you Live During the Plimoth Thanksgiving
by Chris Newell
Age: Upper Elementary-Middle School



Once Upon an Eid
by S.K. Ali
Age: Upper Elementary



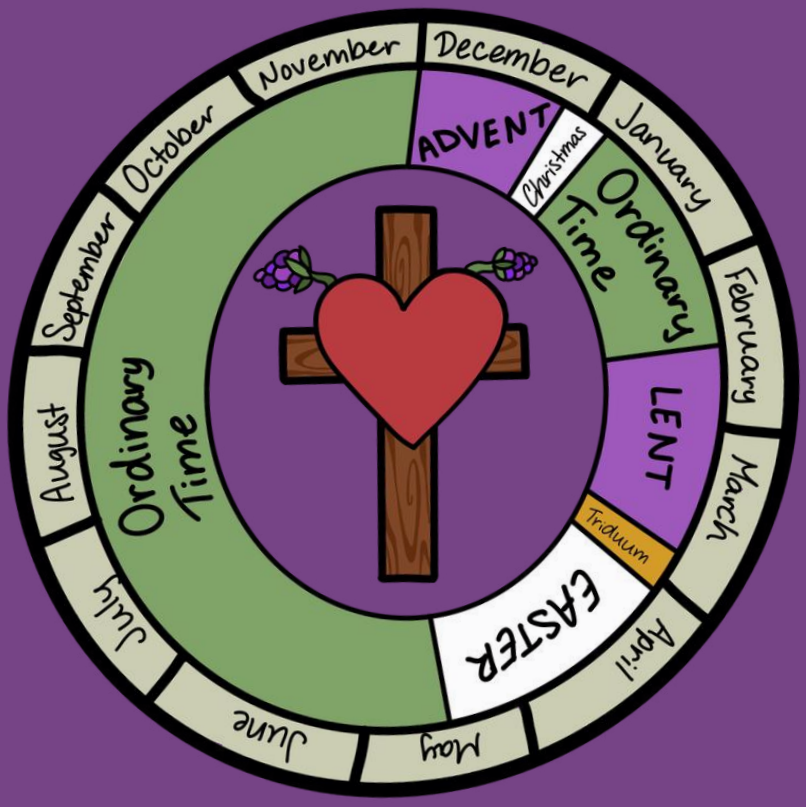
National Regular Average Ordinary Day
by Lisa Katzenberger
Age: Early Elementary

Christian Calendar

By Marie

Sing along to the opening tune of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, "You know Dasher, and Dancer..."

You know Christmas and Easter and Pentecost,
Ash Wednesday and Love Feast and Christmas Eve
But do you recall . . . the full Liturgical Calendar!



The Liturgical Calendar breaks down the year into various seasons based in the Christian tradition. For example, instead of winter or spring, the Liturgical Calendar highlights Advent and Easter. Churches around the world use this calendar as a guide to sermons and scripture readings throughout the year.

Christian holidays help mark special occasions and the passing of the year with intention. The Christian Liturgical calendar includes special times of reflection like Advent and Lent. Some of the holidays are pretty familiar and celebrated in the United States well beyond the church, like St. Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day.

If you read the Liturgical Calendar, do you notice that big section labeled "Ordinary Times?" **The calendar recognizes that some of the best times are ordinary times.** It invites us to consider these moments with intention as well. Think of all the ways you discover God throughout the year. Maybe it is in a conversation with an elder, maybe it is on a walk in nature, maybe it is while laughing so hard you cry. In these times, you might find yourself saying, "Thank you, God!"

Ordinary times make faith a daily practice. There are also surprising holidays during ordinary time. One of my favorites is the Feast Day of St. Francis. St. Francis is known for his care for creation and all living things. On this day, many congregations do a blessing of the animals. Some pastors even invite you to bring your pets to church that day!

What are some of your favorite celebrations during ordinary time? Maybe it's your birthday or the last (or first) day of school, Maybe it's Halloween! Fun fact: Halloween comes from "All Hallow's Eve." It's celebrated the night before the Christian Holiday All Saints Day, a day of remembering everyone who comes before us.

So no matter the season, you are invited to celebrate with faith the full liturgical calendar! Who knows, you might just discover God's presence in some surprising and wonderful traditions.

Meet the Authors



ALIAH

Aliah Fabros is the Children & Youth Peace Formation Organizer for On Earth Peace. In this position she serves as the Editor in Chief of AGAPE Magazine. She is also a professor of writing at a university in San Diego. All these roles rely on and resolve Aliah's commitment to human connection, change-making writing, and justice-informed teaching.



MARIE

Marie Benner-Rhoades is a co-Director at OEP and focuses on youth and young adult peace formation. She loves the ways neighbors care for one another on a daily basis - by sitting on front steps to chat or helping with garden chores - and in big moments by opening their hearts to one another.



SYDNEY

Sydney is a co-Director at OEP. For several years, she has worked as an educator. In her free time, she enjoys cafe-hopping, traveling and learning new languages.



RODAS

Rodas is the Written Communication Organizer at OEP. She is also an Urban Planner and Community Organizer currently living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



VALERIE

Valerie is the Graphic Design intern at OEP. Val enjoys anything art, music, and traveling; she hopes to do more in the future!



JASMINE

Jasmine is the Admin & ARTT Fellow at OEP. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action at Sciences Po Paris. In her free time, she enjoys watching movies, knitting, and hanging out with her cat.



EWAN

Ewan is the Conscientious Objection Fellow at OEP, a former Camp Swatara counselor, and a student at the Center for Justice and Peace at Eastern Mennonite University.

CITATIONS

- Orby & Sib, fireplace (front cover), candle (pg.1), fireplace (pg.3), cross (pg.4), Orby (pg.7 & pg.9), Liturgical Calendar (pg.11), Orby & Sib + presents (back cover) by Valerie Lopez
- Ornament on back cover drawn by Hannah Groff
- Orby + Sib created by Elizabeth Gaver

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AGAPE

On Earth Peace



‘Tis the season

Next season, stay tuned for another issue of Agape!

ON EARTH PEACE

The Story of Christmas