



Religious Accommodation FAQs

Cornell University has an enduring commitment to supporting equality of employment and educational opportunity by affirming the values of diversity and inclusiveness. This commitment includes embracing religious diversity. The university is committed to making every reasonable effort to accommodate the religious observances of our students, faculty and staff.

Frequently Asked Questions

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What does “religious accommodation” mean?

Religious accommodation is the process in which employees and supervisors make a good faith effort to provide a reasonable accommodation of an individual’s sincerely held religious belief.

Why do we do this?

The university is committed to diversity and nondiscrimination and supports the employment of qualified individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Religion, and the New York State Human Rights Law. This process is part of that commitment.

What is the process?

See [University Policy 6.13.8](#). Faculty, staff, and student employees are asked to initiate requests for any desired religious-related workplace accommodation by contacting their supervisor or department chair in a timely manner (at least 30 days in advance of the event, if possible); be willing to make available any documentation related to the tenets of the religious practice or belief that supports the request; complete the [Cornell Request for Religious Accommodation form](#) (pdf) and submit it to their supervisor or department chair; and cooperate with their supervisor’s or department chair’s good faith efforts to accommodate their practice or belief.

Supervisors and department chairs are asked to discuss the basis of the employee’s request with the employee, exercise good faith in making decisions regarding requests for religious-related workplace accommodation, and help make an agreed-upon accommodation effective.

Do all requests have to be granted?

The process requires that a good faith effort is made to provide a reasonable accommodation, which may not be “granting the request.” Reasonable accommodations are determined on an individual basis, and may include (but are not limited to) providing an employee leave for religious observances, providing a time and/or place to pray, and/or providing the flexibility to wear religious attire. Other examples of accommodating an employee’s religious beliefs include scheduling changes,

voluntary substitutions of shifts or hours with a supervisor's or department chair's approval, job reassignments, and lateral transfers.

Factors that are considered in this determination include the nature of the accommodation requested, the duration of the request, alternative accommodations, the impact on the operation of the department or unit, and the ability of the individual to perform the essential functions of the position if the accommodation is granted. Supervisors and department chairs should consult with the AVP for Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in the event that a request may be denied. In the event that the faculty or staff member disagrees with the determination and/or proposed accommodation, they may contact the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity or the University Ombudsman for assistance.

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Additional Resources

Fasting

Fasting is a part of many active faiths around the globe. While the month of Ramadan is known around the world to Muslims and non-Muslims alike as the month of fasting, there are several other religions that practice fasting as well on various religious occasions.

[Accordion]

Religions that require their followers to fast

This listing is adapted from beliefnet.com. This listing may not be inclusive of all religions.

Religion	When they fast	How they fast	Why they fast
Baha'i	The Baha'i fast takes place during Ala, the 19th month of the Baha'i year, from March 2-20.	Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset.	To focus on love of God and spiritual matters.
Buddhist	All the main branches of Buddhism practice some periods of fasting, usually on full-moon days and other holidays.	Depending on the Buddhist tradition, fasting usually means abstaining from solid food, with some liquids permitted.	A method of purification. Theravadin and Tendai Buddhist monks fast as a means of freeing the mind. Some Tibetan Buddhist monks fast to aid yogic feats, like generating inner heat.
Catholic	Catholics fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstain from meat on all Fridays in Lent. For many centuries, Catholics were forbidden to eat meat on all Fridays, but since the mid-1960s, abstaining from meat on Fridays outside of Lent has been a matter of local discretion.	On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, two small meals and one regular meal are allowed; meat is forbidden. On Fridays in Lent, no meat is allowed. For the optional Friday fast, some people substitute a different penance or special prayer instead of fasting.	Teaches control of fleshly desires, penance for sins, and solidarity with the poor. The Lenten fast prepares the soul for a great feast by practicing austerity. The Good Friday fast commemorates the day Christ suffered.

<p>Eastern Orthodox</p>	<p>There are several fast periods, including <u>Lent</u>, Apostles' Fast, Dormition Fast, and the Nativity Fast, and several one-day fasts. Every Wednesday and Friday is considered a fast day, except those that fall during designated "fast-free weeks."</p>	<p>In general, <u>meat, dairy products, and eggs are prohibited</u>. Fish is prohibited on some fast days and allowed on others.</p>	<p>Strengthens resistance to gluttony; helps open a person to God's grace.</p>
<p>Hindu</p>	<p>Fasting is commonly practiced on New Moon days and during festivals such as Shivaratri, Saraswati Puja, and Durga Puja (also known as Navaratri). Women in North India also fast on the day of Karva Chauth.</p>	<p>Depends on the individual. Fasting may involve 24 hours of complete abstinence from any food or drink, but is more often an elimination of solid foods, with an occasional drink of milk or water.</p>	<p>A way to enhance concentration during meditation or worship; purification for the system; sometimes considered a sacrifice.</p>
<p>Jewish</p>	<p><u>Yom Kippur</u>, the Day of Atonement, is the best-known fast day. The Jewish calendar has six <u>other fast days</u> as well, including Tisha B'Av, the day on which the destruction of the Jewish Temple took place.</p>	<p>On Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, eating and drinking are forbidden for a 25-hour period, from sundown to sundown. On the other fast days, eating and drinking are forbidden only from sunrise to sundown.</p>	<p>Atonement for sins and/or special requests to God.</p>
<p>Mormon</p>	<p>The <u>first Sunday of each month</u> is a fast day. Individuals, families, or wards may hold other fasts at will.</p>	<p>Abstaining from food and drink for two consecutive meals and donating food or money to the needy. After the fast, church members participate in a "fast and testimony meeting."</p>	<p>Closeness to God; concentration on God and religion. Individual or family fasts might be held to petition for a specific cause, such as healing for one who is sick or help with making a difficult decision.</p>
<p>Muslim</p>	<p><u>Ramadan</u>, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, is a mandatory fasting period that commemorates the period when the Qur'an was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Various Muslim customs recommend days and periods of fasting in addition to Ramadan.</p>	<p>Abstain from food, drink, smoking, profane language, and sexual intercourse from before the break of dawn until sunset for the entire month.</p>	<p>Some Muslims fast every Monday (some say Thursday) because Prophet Muhammad was said to do this, and some fast during the month of Sha'baan, which precedes Ramadan, and especially during the three days leading up to Ramadan.</p>

Pagan	No organized fast days, but some pagans choose to fast in preparation for Ostara (Spring Equinox).	At the discretion of the individual--some totally abstain from food, others reduce how much they eat.	Intended to purify a person energetically; often used to raise vibrational levels as preparation for magical work. Ostara fasting is used to cleanse oneself from heavier winter foods.
Protestant (Evangelical)	At the discretion of individuals, churches, organizations, or communities.	Though some people abstain from food or drink entirely, others drink only water or juice, eat only certain foods, skip certain meals, or abstain from temptations, edible or not.	Evangelical fasts have become increasingly popular in recent years, with people fasting for spiritual nourishment, solidarity with impoverished people, a counterbalance to modern consumer culture, or to petition God for special needs.
Protestant (Mainline)	Not a major part of the tradition, but fasts can be held at the discretion of communities, churches, other groups, and individuals.	Discretion of those fasting.	For spiritual improvement or to advance a political or social-justice agenda. One example: the ELCA's " Campaign of Prayer, Fasting, and Vigils. "

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Forms

- [Religious Accommodation Request Form](#) (pdf)
- [Religious Accommodation Request Form for HR Representative](#) (pdf)

Policy

Cornell University has an enduring commitment to supporting equality of employment opportunity by affirming the values of diversity and inclusiveness. This commitment includes embracing religious diversity. As part of this commitment, the university will make good faith efforts to provide a reasonable accommodation of an employee's sincerely-held religious belief, unless the university believes such an accommodation would create an undue hardship or is contrary to the university's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. View Policy 16.13.8 [Religious Accommodation](#).

Holidays

Cornell United Religious Works maintains a partial list of [Holy Days and Festivals](#) celebrated by religious communities on our campus.

Who do I call for guidance?

You may contact your [HR representative](#) for guidance or the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity at 607-255-3976 or owdi@cornell.edu for additional information or questions.