



STRAIGHT TALK

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FROM THE DIRECTOR...

As we go about our sometimes seemingly mundane lives -- going to work, caring for our homes and families, doing the laundry -- many wonder what gives true meaning to our lives. We struggle to keep pace with the complex world around us; and yet, simultaneously we struggle to keep hold of that which is sacred in our lives. We believe that it is through the sacred that we find the context and meaning we need to feel that our lives have true significance. This issue of STRAIGHT TALK will focus on the acceptance of religious freedom as it relates to the work place.

Surveys show that Americans have a growing interest in spiritual matters, those interests rarely have a legitimate opportunity to be expressed, explored or even mentioned at work. Society supposedly embraces diversity, but what it really expects is for people to hide their differences. Why? Many of us would much rather not know what a person really thinks, what he or she really believes, whether the topic is religion or something else.

Because of these differences, the Office of EEO/AA Services would like to reiterate the need for sensitivity and understanding when addressing the issue of religion in the workplace.

VCU continues to be committed to valuing and respecting the diversity of our faculty, staff and student body. This diversity includes an appreciation for the variety of religious beliefs we all bring to the University community.

Velma Jackson-Williams
Director of EEO/AA Services



RELIGION IN THE WORKPLACE

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace discrimination based on religion, national origin, race, color or sex. It also requires an employer to reasonably accommodate the religious practices of an employee or prospective employee unless doing so would create an undue hardship for the employer. *Undue hardship* is defined as an accommodation which would require more than minimal cost to the employer.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has observed a steady increase in conflicts about religion in the workplace. Last year, this federal agency investigated 2,572 religious discrimination complaints, which is a 20% increase from the previous year.

The increase for the most part is due to the new immigration patterns and age demographics which have changed the religious make-up of the U. S. labor force. With the change in workers' expectations as they more openly bring their religious identities to the office, religious diversity in the workplace is quickly becoming a very important social issue in this country. The workplace environment is changing rapidly and is forcing management to deal with the difficult – once taboo – subject of religion in the workplace.

In addition, Title VII prohibits harassment based on affiliation and association with a

particular religion as well as discrimination occurring as a result of physical or cultural traits. This means that employers must provide a workplace that is free of religious harassment.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires employers to reasonably accommodate the religious practices of an employee or prospective employee, thus allowing employers' flexibility in how best to accomplish this. For example, if the work schedule conflicts with a religious holy day for an employee, the employer may offer an alternative such as "flexible scheduling". Whatever accommodations are ultimately decided upon both employer and employee should work together to reach an accommodation acceptable to both parties.

In 1997, the Federal Government under former President Clinton established Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Religious Expression in the Federal Workplace. While these guidelines were originally developed for federal agencies, many state and local government agencies have mirrored these same concepts in their policies.

Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Religious Expression in the Federal Workplace

- *Personal religious expression shall be permitted to the extent possible as long as it is consistent with the requirements of law and in the interest of workplace efficiency.*
- *Religious expressiveness will not be restricted except where its expressiveness is outweighed by the employer's interest in effectively providing its services, or when the expressiveness interferes with the rights of other employees or appears to be an official endorsement of religion.*
- *An individual's religious speech cannot be suppressed while not regulating the speech of any other employee that has a similar effect on the efficiency of the workplace.*
- *Agencies can regulate (in a reasonable manner) the time, place and manner of employee speech.*
- *Employees should be allowed to express their private religious beliefs within personal work areas, not open to the public on a regular basis, as long as this expression does not interfere with the agency's fulfilling its official obligation and responsibilities.*
- *Employees may engage in religious expression with co-workers, in the same manner as non-religious private expression, as long as it does not interfere with workplace efficiency.*
- *Employees may include fellow employees in discussions regarding their expression of religious beliefs, as long as said expression (to an outside observer) cannot be interpreted as a governmental endorsement of said religion.*
- *Religious expression should not be permitted if used to verbally attack a fellow employee who does not share the same belief.*
- *Employees may display religious literature and/or art in their personal work areas as long as the viewing public understands that this expression is a personal one of the employee and does not give the impression of government sponsorship, endorsement, favoring or disfavoring.*
- *Anyone holding a supervisory position over an employee may not overtly or covertly insist on an employee's participation in religious activities as a condition of employment, nor may a supervisor ask an employee to stop participating in religious activities outside the workplace.*
- *Expressions or an activity that could be observed or interpreted by an observer as a governmental endorsement or denigration of a religion by supervisors or employees is prohibited.*
- *Employees are protected by the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment; however, the employer has a*

discretionary role to regulate its employee's speech in the workplace.

- *Proselytizing is entitled to the same constitutional protection as any other form of speech.*

While individuals have the right to personal religious expressions, as reflected in the previous guidelines, employees do not have the right to annoy others with their religious convictions. If an employee is asked by a fellow worker or the public to discontinue expressing his/her religious views, while at the workplace, because it is unwanted or unwelcome, that employee must cease doing so. Not heeding to a request to cease and desist is considered religious harassment.

Bottom Line – Respect is the rudimentary rule.

If you have any questions concerning these guidelines, you may contact the Office of EEO/AA Services at 828-1347.



"Mosque" house of worship for the Muslim faith.



"Pagoda" temple of worship for Buddhist faith.



"Cross & bible" symbolic of Christian faith



"Menorah" symbolizing Judaism

A GUIDE TO SOME RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND HOLY DAYS OBSERVED BY U.S. WORKERS

With there being over 1,500 religious organizations that currently worship in the United States, it would be impossible to review each of them in this format but, in an attempt to broaden awareness, we have listed several well-known religions below. *The following list comprises some of these major denominations and their tenets:

Baha'i originated in Persia (Iran) and has more than 110,000 adherents in the U.S. teaches that there is only one God and all religions are one. It does not tolerate sex outside marriage or the drinking of alcohol. Practitioners are not allowed to hold public office, but are allowed to vote. The Baha'i calendar has 19 months, each consisting of 19 days with a fasting period from March 2 to March 20. There are also nine Holy Days during which work is forbidden (three of these days take place from April 21 to May 2).

Buddhism has more than 2,000 sects and can be considered either a religion or a philosophy. It teaches that the cessation of suffering is enlightenment. Chanting as well as meditation are a part of this religion. There is an estimated five million practicing Buddhists in the U.S and 665 million worldwide. Holidays for the

Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Laos, Thailand, and Sri Lanka sects include "Buddha Day" which falls on the full moon of the sixth lunar month and is the most sacred day. Magha Puja, falls on the full moon of the third lunar month. Other sects do celebrate different holidays.

Christian Science belief is based on science and health with keys to scriptures. God is understood as the all-loving, omnipotent Father-Mother, and that man is saved through Christ, through Truth, Life and Love. Christian Scientists discourage the use of alcohol, caffeine, tobacco and drugs, and rely primarily on prayer for healing.

Protestant and Catholic (also know as Christians) – includes Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Catholics. Most Americans identify themselves with Christianity. The Christian belief is in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Holidays include Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ash Wednesday and Christmas.

Church of Scientology is practiced in 107 countries and focuses on "dianetics," a process that leads to a condition called "clear" (being free of all painful memories and undesirable thoughts).

Eastern Orthodox uses icons which are considered the "channels" through which prayer travels up to God. Services are called "Divine Liturgies." There are approximately five million members in the U.S., and is the predominant religion of Eastern Europe. One of the largest subsets belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church with two million members. The most important holiday is Easter Sunday, Christmas is celebrated on January 7, and other holidays include New Year's Day, the Epiphany (January 6), the First Day of Lent (the Monday before Ash Wednesday), Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) and Pentecost (50 days after Easter).

Hinduism – recognizes "Vedas," which are a collection of writings based on the laws of nature. Hindus believe in four disciplines: Janana yoga - gathering the intellect to cut through illusions; Bhakti yoga - directing one's love toward God; Karma yoga - selfless services toward others; and Raja yoga - which is a combination of

the three previous yoga's into one discipline. Hindus refrain from alcohol and eating meat. Hindu holidays are calculated according to the stages of the moon and are moveable.

Islam is based on the Koran, which is the word of God given to Mohammed. There are close to six million practicing Muslims (or Moslems) in the U.S. and it is projected that by 2010, the Islamic faith will be the second largest religion in the nation. There are five pillars of the Islamic faith: bearing witness to the faith; daily prayer (five times a day); one pilgrimage to Mecca; fasting during Ramadan; and, giving money to the poor. Women are required to wear a "hijab" (head and neck covering) and are not allowed to marry outside their faith. The Islamic calendar is based on the a lunar calendar and Ramadan (a major event) lasts for a month during which no food, drink or tobacco is consumed from sun up to sun down, and there is abstinence from sexual relations. Other important holidays are: Id al-Fitr which lasts three days and marks the end of Ramadan; Jaij, the first day of a pilgrimage to Mecca; and Hijra in celebration of the New Year.

Jehovah's Witnesses is a religion that demands unconditional obedience to God. Birthdays and holidays are not celebrated, and premarital sex and abortion are opposed. Only people willing to conform to the Bible's moral standards are accepted into this faith.

Judaism believes in a single god and is based on the five books of Moses – the Torah. Orthodox, conservative, reconstructionist and reform are the four major branches of Judaism. Dietary rules and restrictions are spelled out by Kosher laws. A lunar calendar is followed; therefore, holiday dates change each year, and all holidays, including the Sabbath, begin and end at sundown. Important Jewish holidays are: Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), Chanukah, the Festival of Lights and Sukkot, are Harvest celebrations lasting 8 days.

Mormonism is a conservative religion. Mormons do not partake in tobacco, alcohol, or caffeine. Along with a strong tithing policy, the church opposes divorce, premarital sex, and abortion. Currently there is an estimated 10 million Mormons worldwide. Important holidays

are: Christmas (December 25), Easter (moveable holy day) and Pioneer Day (July 24).

Paganism is the belief of the "Law of Threefold," which states that good and bad deeds return three times. The religion consists of witches, druids, mystic Christians, and shamans. Pagans use magic, worship male and female gods, and revere nature.

Seventh-Day Adventist have one Sabbath day, Saturday. There are 6.2 million members worldwide. Efforts are focused on healthcare and a modified kosher food diet is practiced.

Sikhism combines Islam and Hindusims into one religion. Birth and death are celebrated and belief is in the continuity of life and reality of the soul. Emphasis is placed on having a personal relationship with God. Males wear turbans and do not cut their hair or shave and take the name "Singh"; females wear the "koda," a steel bangle, and take the name "Kaur". Holidays are based on a lunar calendar and include the birthdays of the 10 Sikh gurus; "Vaisakhi," the Hindu Solar New Moon, is also an important holiday.

*By no means is this an exhaustive list of or explanation of all religious practices or observances. This information is provided solely to assist in the understanding of the variety of religious beliefs practiced in the U.S. and to help managers and employers better understand requests for special accommodations.

Tolerance and acceptance of someone with views and beliefs different than your own is necessary in maintaining a safe, healthy, and productive work environment.



"Siddhartha Gautama" aka "Buddha" founder of Buddhism



Hindu God "Vishnu" preserver of the universe.

PREVENTING RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE TIPS FOR MANAGERS:

Managers and employers should:

- 1) **Be aware** of religious discrimination happening in your office.
- 2) **Be attentive.** Since September 11, 2001, there has been an increase of discrimination against Arab-Americans and Muslims. Be attentive to instances of intimidation, discrimination or harassment against Arab-Americans and Muslims.
- 3) **Familiarize** yourself with the policies and procedures that have been established by the University. Information can be obtained from the Office of EEO/AA Services, 828-1347.
- 4) **Advocate** the reporting of **all** inappropriate and unacceptable behavior. Then act on it.
- 5) **Establish** a place where employees will feel safe and secure and are able to discuss their concerns with management.
- 6) **Offer** training to all employees on different religions observed by U.S. workers.
- 7) **Confirm** the University's respect for the wide range of religious practices in the U.S. by offering reasonable accommodations upon request.