THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES | **LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES**
CHRIST · COMMUNITY · COMPASSION | CHRIST · COMMUNAUTÉ · COMPASSION

Holy Day Greetings to Our Jewish Neighbours

The Christian Interfaith Reference Group (CIRG) | The Canadian Council of Churches

ADOPTED BY CONSENSUS ON APRIL 27, 2021

An encouragement to offer bridges of understanding in your community

As a person of faith, are you interested in building relationships with Jewish neighbours? If so, this idea sheet may help you take a simple step: greeting your Jewish neighbours during the significant seasons of the Jewish calendar, particularly at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Pesach (Passover), and Hanukkah.

Such an action can foster an atmosphere of respect and care, and it could open doors for further conversation, relationship, and collaboration between your faith communities.

In concert with others in your parish, congregation, or church group, please consider the following ideas as may be appropriate in your context:

1. Learn about the synagogues, Jewish day schools, or community services in your community. With which one(s) do you have the most natural connections?

2. Decide which of these may be an appropriate recipient of your greeting(s), and prepare to offer your message. If you are sending the message communally, assign one person to coordinate the writing and delivery of the greeting. Determine whether the note is offered to the worshipping body or other group as a whole, or to the presiding rabbi or leader. Phone the synagogue or group to ask who the appropriate recipient for the greeting should be.

3. It may be important to "feel out" the likely reception to your greeting by researching the local history of interactions between your communities. Any historical hurts can be exacerbated if your greeting is perceived to gloss over them. Acknowledgement might be necessary in order for the greeting to be received in the spirit of hope and healing.

4. Research the backgrounds and meanings of the holy day(s) you are referencing. (One organization with good online resources is My Jewish Learning.) Spend time learning the deep meaning that these holy days have for those who celebrate them. Share knowledge and reflections within your own worshipping community. Make this greeting a matter of prayer and reflection.

5. Compose your message. Keep it brief; a half-page is plenty. Use a welcoming, inclusive, and humble tone. Avoid any wording that might be construed as paternalistic or superior-sounding. This is not the place to compare Jewish and Christian traditions. Rather, it is an offering of person-to-person respect and interest in building a genuine, neighbourly friendship. Consult the *Appendix* below for models you can adapt. These models were put together by The Canadian Council of Churches' Christian Interfaith Reference Group with guidance from, and in collaboration with, Jewish partners.

6. Consider making this exercise a communal effort – from your committee or parish / congregation, not just from you as leader(s). The greeting, for example, could be placed at the back of your worship space for congregants to sign.

7. If appropriate, express a willingness to share in future interactions. These could include educational events about each other's traditions; shared worship experiences; simple social time; or gathering for a sporting, games or family activity. Such a gesture may also give rise to community collaboration in local causes, although it should be clear that this is not the underlying reason for your simple greeting.

8. Consider follow-up actions. These could include doing something similar for Muslim or other religious and spiritual communities in your neighbourhood; increasing your participation in community interfaith initiatives; or local interfaith exchanges between worshipping bodies.

See model greetings in Appendix below.

Appendix

Samples of Greetings on Major Holy Days

The following templates are based on examples of greetings that some Christian church communities have offered to their Jewish neighbours in Canada. You are free to adapt them to your context, noting the principles reflected in the guidelines above.

1. **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (varying between early September and mid-October)**

The two-day festival of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) begins a season of self-examination and repentance, and concludes ten days later with the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

> *Peace to you,*
>
> *On Rosh Hashanah I wish to offer my warm and sincere greetings to you, our Jewish neighbours, as your communities prepare to celebrate this season.*
>
> *During this long year of many challenges, may you find the hope and resilience needed for the uncertainties ahead. In this time of great upheaval, may we stand in friendship together.*
>
> *Both personally, and on behalf of the _____, I wish you Shana Tova!*
>
> *May you be written in the book of life, health, and happiness today and always.*
>
> *[Signature(s)]*

2. **Hanukkah (varying between late November and late December)**

An eight-day festival of lights celebrating divine liberation and freedom from persecution during the Maccabean era.

> *The Peace of God be with you,*
>
> *To all among our neighbours in the Jewish community who celebrate the eight days of Hanukkah, may you feel the light and warmth of God's miracles at work in your midst. May we all be grateful for the many divine gifts we are blessed to receive, including the possibility of friendship with one another as people of faith.*
>
> *On behalf of the _____, Hanukkah Sameach!*

[Signature(s)]

3. Pesach (varying between late March and mid-April)

The remembrance of the Passover of the Lord, leading to release of the ancient Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

To our Jewish friends:

Today I write to express my kind greetings to you, our Jewish neighbours, as you celebrate the Passover. May the story of the Exodus, and its possibilities for liberation, inspire you. May you connect in joy with family and friends.

For us, this is also Easter season, when we celebrate resurrection and renewal. Thus, in our way, we join you in celebrating God, the one who liberates us from all evil.

In the name of the _____, and in my name as well, I wish you Chag Sameach.

[Signature(s)]