

ARWG December Diversity Message from Maj St. Pierre.

December is upon us and is one of the most celebratory times of the year for many people across the world. However, before we touch on this month's topic, like Capt Melgosa last month, let me introduce myself to those who don't know me.

I am Maj. Garrick St. Pierre, and am lucky to be the Squadron Commander of the 801st (Crenshaw Memorial Squadron) and the Director of Aerospace Education for Arkansas Wing. I've been with Arkansas Wing since 2008 and before that I spent 7 years as a CAP cadet, having achieved C/LtCol and been involved in many encampments, NCSAs (Blue Beret '85, EAA '86), NCR CAC, and IACE (Israel, '87).

My first career was 25 years in public safety, starting as a firefighter in Kansas City, later becoming a police officer in KC before moving to Little Rock 30 years ago and being with LRPD. I teach Aerospace Investigations and Aerospace Engineering at Cloverdale Middle School (LRSD) in my second career. I am thrilled to be working with Maj. Podgurski and Capt. Melgosa in the wing's diversity department.

First, December has a wide variety of focused days of diversity. Here is a list from Diversity Resources.com:

December 1 – World AIDS Day: This day highlights the importance of HIV/AIDS awareness and raises money for its cure
December 3 – International Day of Persons with Disabilities: This United Nations holiday raises awareness for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

December 10 – International Human Rights Day: A holiday adopted by the UN in 1948 following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

December 7 to December 15 – Hanukkah: A Jewish holiday celebrating Jews rising against their Greek Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt.

December 16 to December 24 – Las Posadas: A religious festival celebrated in Mexico and parts of the U.S. during the Christmas season.

December 18 International Migrants Day: a day set aside to recognize the important contribution of migrants while highlighting the challenges they face.

December 22 – Winter Solstice/Yule: A festival celebrated by Pagan and Wiccan faiths; also important to many Native American tribes.

December 25 – Christmas: A Christian holiday marking the birth of their lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

December 26 to January 1 – Kwanzaa: A 7-day non-religious holiday often celebrated by Black Americans that was inspired by African harvest celebrations.

As I look at the list, the thing that jumps out at me is the number of religious holidays that occur during this month. Here in the U.S. (primarily a Christian-Judaic country), Christmas or Hanukkah are celebrated by the majority of citizens. But we must remember that millions of U.S. citizens have differing beliefs, after all, America has always been “the melting pot”. It is said that one should never discuss religion, but this month that is going to be our focus; learning more about the world’s religions and recognizing we may have a neighbor, relative, co-worker, or someone else who believes differently from our own beliefs.

Religion is one of the bedrocks for over 85% of the world’s population. Let’s first identify the 5 major religions of the world (based on several adherents of that religion) that make up 85%.

Christianity (31.1%): believe that God became man to save all humanity; Jesus came to earth so that all people who acknowledge him and follow his teachings might have eternal life with God.

Islam (24.9%): evil comes from not submitting to Allah by going against his revealed will; as a means of salvation, one may submit to Allah through Allah’s moral laws and Islam’s five doctrines, Muslim creed, prayer, charity to the poor, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able.

Hinduism (15.2%): believe that each person is intrinsically divine and the purpose of life is to seek and realize the divinity within all of us.

Buddhism (8.6%): believes that human life is one of suffering and that meditation, spiritual and physical labor, and good behavior are the ways to achieve enlightenment or nirvana.

Taoism (3.2 %): holds that humans and animals should live in balance with the Tao or the universe; believes in spiritual immortality, where the spirit of the body joins the universe after death.

Folk religions (5.6%): defined as the beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols originating from sources other than a major religion (i.e.: Native American Spiritual beliefs, regional tribes’ beliefs, etc.)

For more detailed information on these religions and more, click on the link:

[Guide to the Major religions](https://www.explorethegod.com//sites/default/files/2021-04/the-main-religions-of-the-world-guide-PDF.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=article&utm_campaign=evergreen&utm_term=cta&utm_content=deeper-look-world-religions)

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Second, we also need to remember the other 15% of the world's population that do not practice any religion. These people are varied in their philosophies such as atheism and agnosticism, secular humanism, and antitheism – amongst others. Throughout history, we see major changes in the world based on religious power and dominance, right through today. The current Middle East conflict is completely religious-based and has thousands of years of history; long, long, before America was 'discovered'. Through this lens, we can realize that millions upon millions of lives have been lost because people did not pause and examine the "other side's" religious tenets of faith before deciding to hate religion and its followers blindly. A quick study shows that most religions are based on very similar views; humans see our common human condition: the realization of the imperfection of the world due to evil, our need for redemption, and our hope for ultimate peace and joy.

So how do we handle December? While you may say "Merry Christmas" or are told "Happy Hanukkah" or receive an indifferent response, every person is entitled to believe as they choose to do so, which is why the Founding Fathers made sure there was no state-imposed religion. That does not make that person any less valuable, any less knowledgeable, or any less of a person because they don't believe as you might. Their different worldview from yours strengthens you and your team because you avoid the danger of an echo chamber.

I encourage you to do your research on the religions and expand your knowledge base. It is always fascinating to learn about different cultures, religions, and customs of others. Though each religion is different—and exclusive claims are made by each—one thing is certain: we all are occupants on this planet and yearn for peace and happiness in our lives.