Religion at Collegiate School

Since 1915, Collegiate School has balanced the School’s commitment to be a diverse and inclusive community with the School’s foundations in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Above all else, we seek to serve people of all faiths and beliefs in a community that holds respect as a core value. Collegiate is nondenominational and not affiliated with any religious group, yet we affirm the central role that faith may play in the spiritual development of the School’s students.

Over time, several traditions associated with religious holidays have become important events for the School community. These traditions, along with a curricular focus on world religions that begins in Junior Kindergarten, provide key milestones in the School's program and the School's student experience.

Parents may choose to have their students participate in an alternative activity (primarily with a service learning focus) instead of participating in a worship service.

Below are the practices and traditions we follow in each division of the School. We are committed to upholding our traditions in 2021-22 despite the continued challenge of COVID-19. Some adjustments may be made for safety reasons.

We are continuously exploring ways to live our mission and are planning an upcoming community-wide engagement process to gather additional input.

Lower School

Religion is taught and explored through assemblies and worship services in the Lower School, as outlined here:

Assemblies:

Town Meetings: Lower School Town Meetings are assemblies that focus on a variety of non-religious topics. The Lower School Prayer is recited as a group at each Town Meeting and in some Lower School classrooms. Students may choose silent reflection during the prayer recitation.

Book Gatherings: All students attend several assemblies that focus on religious traditions from around the world.

Lower School High Holy Days Celebration: Students in all grades attend Rosh Hashanah and/or Yom Kippur assembly where the traditions of the days are presented in an age-appropriate and informative format.
Passover Seder: All students attend an informative presentation featuring the symbolic foods of the holiday. Students learn about Jewish traditions surrounding the meal, while also learning to appreciate the universal message of freedom.

Worship Services:

Kindergarten Christmas Chapel: Kindergarten students prepare and present Christmas songs and readings at River Road Presbyterian Church to their families. Students in all Lower School grades attend the dress rehearsal.

Lower School Chapel: Second Grade students take turns preparing and presenting a chapel program at River Road Presbyterian Church. Chapels may focus on values and include a variety of speakers. Students in all Lower School grades attend.

Concert of Carols: Third Grade classes prepare and present a Christmas Pageant and songs at River Road Presbyterian Church to their families. Students in all Lower School grades attend the dress rehearsal.

Middle School

Religion and ethics are taught and explored through the School’s history curriculum, assemblies and worship services.

History Curriculum:

The 5th Grade curriculum addresses ancient world cultures. Fifth Graders study the five major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) within the context of their ancient world history curriculum. An emphasis is placed on looking at how and why each of these religions came into existence and the basic beliefs, doctrines, holidays and customs of each religion. Discussions about polytheism and monotheism are ongoing.

The 6th Grade focuses on World History (excluding North America) in the modern era. In learning about the cultures and recent history in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, students are reacquainted with Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. They are also introduced to the religions of Africa. They discuss the similarities, differences and conflicts among these religions. They also learn to distinguish between ethnic affiliation and religious affiliation.

The 7th and 8th Grade history courses focus on U.S. History from 1850 to the present. The importance of religious freedom and diversity in the study of various waves of immigration is explored in 7th Grade. The rise of intolerant fundamentalism in the 1920s and the persecution of the Jewish people during World War II are also studied in the 8th Grade. Eighth Graders study the Holocaust, visit the Virginia Holocaust Museum, and learn the important role of the upstander as it relates to religious freedom and other aspects of diversity.

Assemblies and Worship Services:

Worship services include Lessons and Carols and Pageant. Educational assemblies on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are held during the school year.

Lessons and Carols: A service at Second Baptist Church with music and readings for boys in Grades 5-12. Fifth Grade boys sing Christmas hymns as choristers. The nine biblical lessons are
traditional and read in succession by 6th-12th Grade readers, a faculty member and Collegiate Head of School. The service is led by an ordained minister.

Pageant: Girls in Grades 5-12 perform the Nativity story through scenes inspired by famous paintings and traditional Christmas hymns and carols. Pageant takes place at All Saints Episcopal Church for two nights each December.

Brunch: Girls in Grades 5-12 attend Brunch (description below).

**Upper School**

Religion and ethics are taught and explored through the School’s history curriculum, assemblies and worship services. Worship services include the School’s Lessons and Carols and Pageant. (Descriptions above).

Brunch: Girls in Grades 5-12 attend Brunch, a musical production written and performed by junior girls in honor of senior girls. Brunch is lighthearted, has a different theme each year and typically includes reference to Christmas spirit and characters such as Santa Claus. In addition, Fifth Grade girls perform the carol The Twelve Days of Christmas. Brunch takes place in the Oates Theater.

Feast of Juul: Upper School faculty and boys gather for dinner in a festively decorated McFall Hall. The tradition includes live music, letters to St. Nicholas and good-natured roasting and toasting of seniors and teachers.