

# Accommodating Our Religious Holiday Observances

## *A Learning Tool*

A WMCN School Impact Committee Project



(This page intentionally left blank.)

# Table Of Contents

Introduction	2
Baha'i Faith	4
Buddhism	6
Chinese New Year	6
Christianity	8
Eastern Orthodox	12
Hinduism	13
Islam	15
Jehovah's Witnesses	18
Judaism	20
Kwanzaa	23
Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism)	23
Seventh Day Adventists	24
Sikhism	24

## References:

<http://orl.usc.edu/religiouslife/holydays/page/1>

A great fully integrated calendar of religious holidays with a very brief description of its significance with actual dates of observances per month.

<http://diversity.missouri.edu/get-involved/religion/holidays.php>

The main resource for this brochure, as its format was adopted to include the suggested accommodations and emphasis on how the holiday might be observed.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

A great on-line up to date interfaith calendar with dates and brief descriptions.

*World Religions: Beliefs and Traditions from Around the Globe* by Robert Pollock

*What I Believe: A Young Persons' Guide to the Religions of the World* by Alan Brown and Andrew Langley

## *Introduction*

**W**inchester is becoming more diverse. People of different races, ethnicities and faith groups are coming together in our neighborhoods, in our places of business, and in our classrooms. As a town deeply committed to upholding our human rights statement, and a school community which strives for a culture of openness and inclusivity, we desire to support neighbors, students, faculty, employers and employees of different religious faiths. This requires education, respect, and accommodation.

This brochure, created jointly by the School Impact Committee of the Winchester Multicultural Network and the School Administration, is a step toward such respectful inclusivity. In this brochure, we have briefly summarized key holidays of a multitude of religious and ethnic observances. We have briefly explained the holiday, shared how the holiday might be commonly observed, and suggested accommodations such observance might require.

Massachusetts State and Federal Law requires schools to make reasonable accommodations for the religious needs of students and employees in observance of holy days. It is Winchester Public School Policy that students receive ample and flexible accommodations to make up subject material, assignments and assessments within a reasonable time (assuming students will not do schoolwork or study during their absence).

The School Department will take major religious and ethnic holidays into consideration when scheduling test preparation, tests and long-term assignments and will avoid scheduling one-time events (field trips, athletic events, music or theater performances, auditions, group photographs, back-to-school functions, and graduation) when possible on major religious and ethnic holidays.

Students will not face penalties for their non-participation in school-scheduled events nor be deprived of receiving any award or eligibility or opportunity to compete for any award because of a religious/ethnic holiday absence.

The School Department will distribute school calendars to teachers, staff and families that include those major religious and ethnic holidays whose observance would require absence from school or other accommodations.

This brochure was created to better educate our community and to encourage families to request and expect reasonable accommodations. The school administration strongly encourages students and families to make their observance known to individual teachers so that they can plan appropriate accommodations together in advance of the absence or holiday observance. Additionally, notifying the school administration of a student's absence for religious reasons results in an excused absence. Reference can be made to this brochure as a resource for understanding what individual religious observances may look like, how they impact the student, and as a guide to planning accommodations to support these observances.

It is our collective hope that this brochure will be an educational tool for all in our community to better understand and therefore respectfully accommodate our fellow students, colleagues and neighbors as we embrace our increasingly diverse community and uphold our town's human rights statement.

*An attempt has been made to include significant holidays that might require school accommodations. Please let us know of any errors or omissions found in this brochure so they may be addressed. Please also note that there are some families (agnostics, deists, or atheists) who are nonobservant of specific holidays, so generalizations regarding holiday times should be sensitively approached. We also recognize that there are other faith-based traditions not included in this brochure that might require accommodation.*

## *Baha'i Faith*

The Baha'i faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. The Baha'ullah is regarded as the most recent in a line of messengers from God (Abraham, Moses, the Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad). In the United States it is estimated that there are some 170,000 Bahai's living in 9,529 localities, and 'gathering' in 1,080 Spiritual Assemblies. The central tenet of the Baha'i faith is that there is one single race and that there are forces that are breaking down the traditional divisions of race, class, gender, creed and nation toward total Unification. It is the only independent world religion whose founder unequivocally stated that women and men are equal.

**General Practices:** Gardens are a requirement for Baha'i Houses of Worship. There are currently seven continental Baha'i Houses of Worship in the world. Each has a unique style but they all have four basic requirements: they are circular shape, have nine sides, a dome, and are surrounded by nine gardens with walkways.

**Date Details:** The Baha'i calendar is made up of 19 months, each with 19 days, and days are reckoned from sunset to sunset. There are nine Holy Days on which work should be suspended, beginning with *Naw Ruz\**, or *New Year*, which is celebrated on March 21. Then there is the *Festival of Ridvan* which runs from April 21 to May 2 when work should be suspended on the first day (April 21), the ninth day (April 29) and the twelfth day (May 2). Other special days include the *Declaration of the Bab*, observed on May 23, the day marking the *Ascension of Baha'u'llah* on May 29; then the day marking the *Martyrdom of the Bab* on July 9 at noon, the *birth of the Bab* on October 20 and the *birth of Baha'u'llah* on November 12.

Since 19 months of 19 days each adds up to 361 days, there is a four-day period—or a five-day period in a Leap Year—called Ayyam-i-ha or Intercalary Days which is the Bahai time of gift-giving. It falls between the 18th and 19th months, from February 26 to March 1.

Finally, the 19th Baha'i month, from March 2 to Naw Ruz (March 21), is the Period of the Fast, during which Bahai's between the ages of 15 and 70 refrain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, and set aside time each day for prayer and meditation. This lasts for 19 days but exemptions are given in cases of illness and pregnancy, for nursing mothers, and in cases of extended travel and arduous physical labor.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Work or school absences on these nine holy days, accommodations for students/teachers who might be fasting during the school day and who may need a place to go outside of the cafeteria during lunch.

\*Nowruz (Norooz) is also celebrated by all religions in Iran as the Persian New Year and in many other Eastern nations. This occurs at the exact minute of the New Year according to the Lunar calendar (the vernal equinox) and may fall in the middle of the night between 3/20 and 3/21. Tables may be filled with traditional foods and with items that represent new life and various wishes for the new year. Traditional meals and readings from the *Quran* may mark this holiday. Some observers wake up and celebrate in the middle of the night, making school/work attendance the next day challenging.

## Buddhism

### Diwali

Diwali—the Hindu “festival of lights”—is an extremely popular holiday for multiple religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism) throughout Southern Asia. Diwali extends over five days, and celebrates the victory of good over evil. *The Times of India* described Diwali as “a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple.” Fireworks, oil lamps, and sweets are common, making this a favorite holiday for children. The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people’s homes.

**General Practices:** Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.

**Date details:** Diwali usually falls between mid October and mid November.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Flexibility when scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Buddhist employees/students may request a vacation day on this date.

### Lunar New Year

(also known as Chinese New Year, Vietnamese New Year (Tet), Spring Festival, Korean New Year and others).

This is the most important of traditional Chinese and other Southeast Asian holidays and is very important in the Buddhist tradition. It is also observed by Confucianists and Taoists.

**General Practices:** Families gather together to spend the evening preparing/enjoying traditional festive meals and giving out symbolically decorated “good luck” red envelopes with gift money—the custom centering on children but red envelopes are also exchanged between friends, relatives and colleagues.

**Date details:** Corresponds to the New Moon in Aquarius, which can fall from late January to mid-February

**Recommended Accommodations:** Flexibility when scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Many Chinese and Buddhists employees/students may request this day off.



## ***Magha Puja Day***

Magha Puja Day commemorates an important event in the life of the Buddha, in which the four disciples traveled to join the Buddha. This is not as important as the above holy days. It is observed on the full moon day of the 3rd lunar month (usually late February, early March).

## ***Buddha Day/Visakha Puja***

This holiday is traditionally known as Buddha's birthday. It is the major Buddhist festival, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. It is usually celebrated at the first full moon in May.

**General Practices:** Buddhists often decorate their homes and visit their local temples. Observers are encouraged to refrain from slaughtering and to avoid eating meat on this date. This holiday's importance varies in different parts of the world. Some Buddhist groups will celebrate for three days while others have a one day observance. It is more of a regional holiday. Buddha day is more important than Magha Puja Day but not as important as The Chinese New Year and Diwali.

**Date Details:** Observed on the full moon day in May

**Recommended Accommodations:** Provide food accommodation as requested, and offer vegetarian options when planning menus for events on this date.

# Christianity

## Advent

Advent is a spiritual season of preparation before Christmas celebrated by many Christians acknowledging the Second Coming of Jesus Christ while commemorating the First Coming of Jesus at Christmas. It's the beginning of a new liturgical year. The first Sunday of Advent is therefore the Church's "New Year's Day." Advent begins the Christmas cycle.

**General Practices:** During this season many attend special church services, partake in corporate and individual prayer, read and study Biblical scriptures and count down the days until Christmas by lighting candles.

**Date details:** The season of Advent begins on the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas Day, or the Sunday which falls closest to November 30th annually (Sunday begins at sundown of the day before) and continues through Christmas Eve, December 24th.

## Christmas

Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.

**General Practices:** Many celebrate this holiday by giving and receiving gifts and Christmas cards, attending church services, partaking in corporate and individual prayer monetary offerings, singing traditional hymns and Christmas carols, reading and studying Biblical scriptures, decorating Christmas trees, and homes and yards with Nativity scenes depicting the Birth of Jesus Christ and the hanging of wreaths, visiting family and friends and sharing celebratory meals.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown on Dec. 24 annually and continues with all day celebration on Dec. 25.

**Recommended Accommodations:** This is a national holiday in the United States, so special accommodations are likely not required.

## **Lent**

Lent is the period of 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter and is traditionally a time of fasting and reflection. Lent is meant to represent the 40 days Jesus Christ sacrificed and withdrew into the desert to prepare for his ministry before his crucifixion.

**General Practices:** Lent may be observed by surrendering a particular vice, and for some, fasting on certain days. During this time, many Christians abstain from eating meat on Fridays.

**Date details:** Eastern and Western Churches both observe Lent but they count the 40 days differently with Eastern Churches beginning Lent on the Monday of the 7th week before Easter and ending it on the Friday, nine days before Easter (“Great Lent”). Western churches start Lent on the 7th Wednesday before Easter (Ash Wednesday).

**Recommended Accommodations:** Provide food accommodation as requested—prohibitions include animal products. Be mindful of those who might be fasting.

## **Ash Wednesday**

This is the first day of Lent, the period of forty days before Easter in which many Christians sacrifice ordinary pleasures to reflect on Christ’s sacrifice.

**General Practices:** On this day, many attend special church services, partake in corporate and individual prayer, reading and studying Biblical scriptures, and wear a cross of ashes marked on foreheads. Most Christians, who observe Ash Wednesday, abstain from meat on this day. For some Christians, this is also an obligatory day of fasting.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Provide food accommodation as requested—prohibitions include animal products. Be aware of those who might be fasting. Also, some people attend church services earlier in the day and may therefore be absent for part of their school/work day.

## ***Palm Sunday***

A commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as crowds lined his path with palm fronds

**General Practices:** Attending church services, partaking in corporate and individual prayer, distribution of palm leaves commemorating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion.

## ***Maundy Thursday/Holy Thursday/Great Thursday***

Maundy refers to the commands Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper: Love with humility by serving one another and remember His sacrifice. This Last Supper was the Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples on the night before He was crucified. In contrast to joyful Easter celebrations when Christians worship their resurrected Savior, Maundy Thursday services are typically more solemn occasions, marked by the shadow of Jesus' betrayal.

**General Practices:** Attending church services, partaking in corporate and individual prayer, partaking in communion (Eucharist), sharing meals, and foot-washing ceremonies among some Christian denominations.

**Date Details:** Maundy Thursday is observed during Holy Week on the Thursday before Easter (one day before Good Friday).

## ***Good Friday***

This Friday before Easter commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Among some sects of Christianity and in many countries, Good Friday marks a day of fasting.

**General Practices:** Prayer, fasting, and noon or afternoon services in some Christian denominations.

**Date details:** Always falls on the Friday before Easter Sunday.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Provide food accommodation as requested—meat (fish is not considered meat) is prohibited during meals for some.

## ***Easter***

Easter is an annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

**General Practices:** Church services, celebratory meals, family gatherings, and for some, distribution of colored eggs, baskets and sweet treats. It is a celebration of renewal.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Be mindful that Easter observance, always on a Sunday, and the holy days leading up to Easter Sunday, make Monday tests or project due dates more challenging.

**Date details:** Easter Sunday is determined by the Gregorian calendar (Gregorian calendar regulates ceremonial cycle of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches).

## *Eastern Orthodox*

Often times, people will identify Orthodox Christianity with specific ethnic groups, including Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox (Lebanese and Syrians), Armenian Orthodox, and Albanian Orthodox. Though different in their nominal identity, these Orthodox Christian jurisdictions have similar religious practices.

**General Practices:** The Eastern Orthodox Great Friday, as in the western churches, commemorates the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and is observed as a day of mourning. Many Orthodox Christians fast during the Great Lent (40 days) prior to Holy Week (the week before Easter) as well as during Holy Week itself.

**Date Details:** Though theological differences exist between the western Christian churches and the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches, the most obvious difference to most is the date for the celebration of Easter and for some, the date for the celebration of Christmas (both of which follow the traditional Julian calendar instead of the western Gregorian calendar).

**Recommended Accommodations:** Observers of this Christian faith may request a day off to observe their Great Friday holy day or their Christmas day which differs from the Western Good Friday and Christmas that is commonly a school holiday. Accommodations for those fasting should be provided. Additionally, be mindful that Easter observance, always on a Sunday, and the holy days leading up to Easter Sunday, make Monday tests or project due dates more challenging.

# Hinduism

In the Hindu faith, there are many holidays, with adherents of this faith celebrating numerous festivals for various events and deities. Major Hindu holidays vary from region to region. Most festivals are based on the lunar calendar, so dates also vary. Three notable festivals celebrated by Hindus all over the world are Diwali, Navaratri or Dussehra, and Holi.

## Diwali

Diwali or Dipavali—the Hindu “festival of lights”—is an extremely popular holiday for multiple religions (including Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism) throughout South Asia. Diwali extends over five days and celebrates the victory of good over evil. The *Times of India* described Diwali as “a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple.” Fireworks, oil lamps, and sweets are common, making this a favorite holiday for children. The lamps are lit to help the goddess of prosperity and good fortune, Lakshmi, to find her way into people’s homes.

**General Practices:** Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.

**Date Details:** October–November

**Recommended Accommodations:** Flexibility when scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Hindu employees/students may request a vacation day on this date.

## Navaratri or Dussehra

Navaratri, the nine-night festival, is also known as Dussehra in the south, a ten-day festival, and Durga Puja in Bengal. The festival marks the victory of the divine mother over a demonic power and celebrates various aspects of the feminine. In North India, it coincides with the Rama Lila festival which also celebrates the triumph of good over evil.

**General Practices:** Fasting and praying. There are parties and public gatherings with music, dance, and drama which all contribute to the carnival atmosphere.

**Date Details:** September–October

## *Holi*

Also known as the “Festival of Colors,” this holiday is a celebration of the colorful spring and a farewell to the dull winter. It marks the end of the old year and the destruction of evil with the joyous renewal of spring.

**General Practices:** Sprinkling colored water and powder on others, lighting bonfires signifying the end of evil and the old year.

**Date Details:** End of the winter season in late February or early March

Some other Hindu holidays include days to venerate specific gods. Shivaratri, Shiva’s night, is in January–February, when Hindus fast and forgo sleep to sing bhajans, traditional Hindu songs. For Ganesh Chaturthi in August–September, figures of Ganesh are taken in festive processions and immersed in water. Krishna Jayanti, also known as Janmashtami, in July–August, celebrates the birthday of Krishna and is marked by singing, dancing, and the staging of plays depicting the life of Krishna.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Flexibility when scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Hindu employees/students may request a vacation day on this date.



# Islam

## Ramadan

Ramadan is the month on the Muslim calendar in which teenage and adult Muslims are obligated to fast. Fasting requires Muslims to refrain from consuming food, drinking liquids, smoking and having sexual relations during daylight hours. This is a time for self-reflection and to focus on faith through fasting and prayer, and is a time of great significance for the Muslims. Exemption from this obligation is in the case of illness, travel, pregnancy, certain medical conditions and menstrual bleeding. Ramadan is also revered because the *Quran* (Muslim holy book) was first revealed during this month, and Muslims see the *Quran* as God's words.

**General Practices:** Daily fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Each fast begins at sunrise and ends at sunset, and observers break the fast each night with prayer, reading of the *Quran*, and a meal called the "iftar." In addition, many Muslims also attend night prayers at Mosques. Muslims believe that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than any other time of the year. During Ramadan, it is customary for many Muslims to give charity to the poor, spend more time in prayer and worship, refrain from bad habits, and share food with family and friends.

**Date Details:** The beginning of the 29 or 30 day period of observation is determined by the lunar calendar.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Most Muslims continue their normal activities (school, work, sports, volunteering, etc.) during this month while fasting. However, be sensitive to the fact that students and faculty will likely have less energy and stamina while observing Ramadan. Also, limit scheduling of evening events since this is the time Muslims will be breaking their fast.

## *Eid ul-Fitr*

Eid ul-Fitr means “breaking of the fast,” and is a major Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting.

**General Practices:** An important part of the observance is a morning prayer service at the mosque. The rest of the celebration often includes exchanging gifts, giving a monetary gift to the children called “Eidi,” enjoying feasts, and getting together with family and friends.

**Date Details:** Eid ul-Fitr is on the day immediately following the month of Ramadan (determined by the lunar calendar). It is a three day celebration in the Muslim world, but is only observed on the first day in North America.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Avoid scheduling academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. Students are likely to miss school on this day to celebrate this significant Muslim holiday.

## *Eid ul-Adha*

Eid ul-Adha is a major Muslim holiday that commemorates prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham) total faith in God. According to the scriptures, prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son in God’s name. When Ibrahim was prepared to kill his son, divine intervention resulted in a sheep to be sacrificed instead. Muslims view this holiday as an important annual reminder of Ibrahim’s willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice.

**General Practices:** Prayers, gift giving, and sacrificing of a prescribed farm animal with a portion of the meat gifted to the poor.

**Date details:** This holiday is observed the day after the annual pilgrimage, called Hajj, is completed in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is observed on the 10th day of 12th month on the Muslim lunar calendar. Eid ul-Adha is a three day holiday in the Muslim world, but is only observed on the first day in North America.

**Recommended Accommodation:** Avoid scheduling academic deadlines, events, and activities on the first day. Students are likely to miss school on this day to celebrate this significant Muslim holiday.

## **Muharram**

Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. And although it marks the beginning of the Islamic new year, it is considered a time of mourning for Muslims, particularly those of the Shiite faith. The event marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala when the grandson of prophet Muhammad was killed by the forces of the second Umayyad caliph. The mourning reaches its climax on the tenth day, known as Ashura, on which the forces of Yazid killed the 72 individuals who fought alongside the prophet's grandson.

**General Practices:** The first 10 days of the month are marked by arranging 'majalis' (gatherings) to review Islamic teachings and to commemorate the sacrifice of the prophet Muhammad's grandsons. Many Muslims will fast during the 9th and 10th of Muharram.

**Recommended Accommodation:** Flexibility when scheduling academic deadlines, events, and activities on the 9th and 10th day of this month.

## *Jehovah's Witnesses*

The fundamental principle of the Jehovah's Witnesses belief is the establishment of God's Kingdom, the Theocracy (a form of government by God). They believe this will come about after Armageddon, the ultimate and final conflict between good and evil. They do not associate with other denominations nor with secular government. They refuse to salute the flag of nations, to join the military or to vote. They follow their own version of the Christian bible called *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Witnesses meet in churches called Kingdom Halls organized with appointed members called Overseers or Elders. Witnesses believe that any blood that leaves the body must be destroyed, thus the prohibition against blood transfusions.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are members of a Christian-based religious movement and consider themselves Christian, they do NOT celebrate any traditional Christian holidays (Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter) nor other so called pagan holidays (Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Halloween, Valentine's Day, nor birthdays). They acknowledge that their beliefs are quite distinct from mainstream Christianity. There is no Sabbath; all days are regarded as holy.

### ***Memorial of Christ's Death***

Jehovah's Witnesses observe this one holiday which takes place in the spring at the same time as the Jewish Passover.

**General Practices:** Beginning at sunset, Witnesses congregate at Kingdom Halls to commemorate "The Lord's Evening Meal" (the passing of the wine and bread similar to the Christian last supper observance in the Holy Bible). The meetings are commenced and closed with Christian songs and prayer. It is the celebration and reflection of the love shown to mankind by the heavenly father Jehovah God by allowing His only-begotten Son to die for them, and the love Jesus showed in sacrificing his life willingly for their salvation.

**Date Details:** The Observance of The Memorial of Christ's Death takes place on the anniversary of the Last Supper, calculated according to the lunar calendar in use in Christ's time. Generally this day of observance falls after the first day of the Jewish Passover and the Thursday before Good Friday beginning at sunset.

**Accommodations:** Respecting their desire to not observe any holidays or birthdays or saying the pledge of allegiance.

# Judaism

## General observances

**Kosher:** Some more observant Jews may observe the Kosher food restrictions in which they will only eat food prepared and blessed according to Jewish law. They usually refrain from eating pork, bacon, ham and shellfish and from mixing milk with meat meals.

**Jewish holidays** all begin at sundown the night before the holiday is generally listed in the secular calendar. Thus, most accommodations will begin the evening before the holiday and continue through the next full day. While the holiday may technically end at sundown, most families will spend the evening together with extended family and friends thus making evening work on the actual holiday also difficult.

Jewish holidays follow the lunar calendar which is why Jewish holiday dates change from year to year. However, the Jewish calendar adds an additional month to it's calendar every 3-4 years so that the holidays are generally within the same time of year on the secular calendar.

## Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is the start of the Jewish New Year—a day of judgement and remembrance. The Jewish calendar celebrates the New Year in the seventh lunar month (Tishrei) which falls somewhere between early September and mid October in the secular calendar. Observed as one or two days of rest, reflection, prayer and celebration ten days before Yom Kippur.

**General Practices:** Prayer in synagogue in the evening and the following day and festive meals.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown of prior day. Rosh Hashanah is a two day holiday but some Jews may only observe the first day.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on these two days, the evening prior to the first day, or the day after the holiday is over. Many will be absent from work or school for this two day holiday and will not be able to do “work” until the holiday is over making deadlines for the day after the holiday also unachievable.

## *Yom Kippur*

Yom Kippur is often considered the holiest day of the year for Jews, and the day is dedicated to atonement and abstinence.

**General Practices:** During Yom Kippur, Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset, and light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the night of Yom Kippur.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown of prior day.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date, on the evening before and for the day after a day of fasting. Many will miss school or work and may need to leave early the day before to prepare for the pre-fast meal.

## *Hanukkah/Chanukah*

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights, and lasts for eight days. Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish struggle for religious freedom. The history of the holiday involves a historic military victory in which a Jewish sect called the Maccabees defeated the Syrian Greeks. The celebration commemorates a miracle in which a sacred temple flame burned for eight days on only one day's worth of oil.

**General Practices:** On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate in the evening, with food and song, as well as exchanging gifts for eight days.

**Date details:** Hanukkah begins at sundown of prior day.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Academics and work permitted, not a work holiday; however, families often enjoy some evening time together and individual families may have traditions that make a specific evening participation difficult.

## ***Pesach/Passover (Jewish)***

Pesach is an eight-day-long observance commemorating the freedom and exodus of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses II.

**General Practices:** Family gatherings for ritualized meals called Seders on the first two nights on which the Haggadah (a recounting of the escape to freedom) is read, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the last night of Passover.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown of prior day.

**Recommended Accommodations:** The seder meal requires preparation and time so many will be unable to work or participate in evening events on those first two evenings. Also during those 8 days, most Jews will observe the food restrictions and not eat anything with leavening (bread products) and will eat Matzah instead. So events with food should provide Kosher for Passover options. Some people observe the prohibition of doing work (of any kind) on the first two days and the last two days of Passover. These observers would need accommodations that support this prohibition.

## ***Sabbath***

A weekly observance of the day God rested after creating the world.

**General Practices:** A time of deliberate rest and abstention from doing any work (driving, operating electricity, computer use, homework . . .). *Torah* study is undertaken by those most observant.

**Date details:** Begins every Friday night at sundown and continues through sundown on Saturday night.

**Recommended Accommodations:** Because sundown begins quite early in the winter in New England, many people may need to be excused from events extending into this time on Friday evening.

There are several other Jewish holidays that some may observe by abstaining from doing any work, such as certain days in the nine-day-long celebration of Sukkot, and during Shavuot. Individual accommodations should be respected.



## Kwanzaa

**Kwanzaa** is a week-long celebration honoring African heritage in African-American culture. Historian and activist Maulana Karenga developed the holiday in the 1960s. It is not a religious holiday, per se, but is a cultural celebration. Kwanzaa has seven core principles: Unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

**General Practices:** Families celebrating Kwanzaa decorate their households with objects of art, and colorful African cloth known as kente, and many women wear kaftans. Many families display symbols of Kwanzaa that represent the seven core principals including the candle holder (kinara) with seven candles, and the black, red and green flag (pan-African colors). Kwanzaa ceremonies may include drumming, libations, discussion of the principals, candle-lighting rituals and a feast (karamu).

**Date Details:** Kwanzaa is observed every year from Dec. 26 – Jan. 1.

**Accommodations:** Schools are usually closed during this time so specific accommodations may not be necessary.

## Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism)

Like many other Christian churches, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) regards Sunday as a holy day, the day of rest and day of worship. Most Latter-Day Saint families will spend a substantial part of Sunday in meetings and worship with their community.

Monday evening is often reserved for Family Home Evening, during which families engage in prayer, sing hymns and songs, read Scripture and engage in teaching and discussion on the ethics of life.

Beyond that, Latter-Day Saints truly celebrate only two religious festivals: Easter and Christmas. An additional festival is Pioneer Day, on July 24, which celebrates the arrival of the first Latter-Day Saint pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

## *Seventh Day Adventists*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was formally established in the U.S. in 1863, is a Protestant Christian denomination distinguished by its observance of Saturday as the Sabbath day, similar to Judaism. The church is also known for its emphasis on diet and health and its conservative principles and lifestyle.

## *Sikhism*

Founded over 500 years ago, the Sikh religion today has a following of over 25 million people worldwide and has over 500,000 followers in the U.S. Sikhism is the 5th largest world religion. Sikhism preaches equality, peaceful coexistence, monotheism, and the belief that we are all one brotherhood of humankind.

Ceremonies are held to celebrate the birth of the first and tenth Guru (teachers), and to commemorate the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, as well as Baisakhi (a harvest festival), the date that the Khalsa was founded.

**General Observances:** These special days are celebrated with traditional sacred hymns, and food prepared in the communal kitchen.

**Accommodations:** There are generally work restrictions on these days.

### ***Vaisakhi or Baisakhi***

Vaisakhi is the Sikh new year festival and commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was formalized by the 10th Guru. Vaisakhi is also a long-established harvest festival.

**General Practices:** There are often parades, dancing, and singing throughout the day. These celebrations involve music, singing, and chanting of scriptures and hymns.

**Date specifications:** Celebrated on April 13th or 14th.

## ***Diwali***

Diwali is a Hindu festival of lights that was embraced by the Sikhs to celebrate the release from prison of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, from prison in 1619. The Golden Temple was illuminated with lights to welcome the Guru home, and Sikhs continue this tradition by lighting lamps on Diwali each year. The Golden Temple is illuminated with thousands of lights.

**Date specifications:** Usually some time in October or November

## ***Guru Nanak's Birthday***

Guru Nanak is the first Guru and is the founder of the Sikh religion. His birthday is celebrated shortly after Diwali.

WINCHESTER  
MULTICULTURAL  
NETWORK



*Building Inclusive Community*

P.O. Box 346, Winchester, MA 01890  
781-729-7100  
office@wmcn.org • www.wmcn.org