

## Religious & Ethnic Holidays & Days of Observance (Selected) February 2017

February  
2017



This handout is to call your attention to just **some** of the many nationally and internationally recognized and/or celebrated diverse days of observance and religious/ethnic holidays that fall within the month of February 2017. We invite you to share it with the students, staff, and faculty you work with across campus. For more information, feel free to visit the Diversity Resource Calendar located on the Office of Student Life's website: [http://www.diversityresources.com/aa\\_gsr/main\\_month.php](http://www.diversityresources.com/aa_gsr/main_month.php)

Thank you,  
Student Life's Mosaic: Center for Culture and Diversity & Interfaith Center Staff

**February 1: Vasant Panchami: Hindu.** This festival marks the beginning of spring and honors Sarasvati, goddess of knowledge, music, and art.

**February 2: Candlemas: Christian.** This religious holiday originated with the ancient Jewish custom that required mothers to present their first male child in the temple. As a Jewish mother, Mary would have presented Jesus on February 2. The day is associated with light and purification. The holiday takes its name from the custom of blessing the church's supply of candles for the year on this date.

**Imbolc: Pagan and Wiccan.** Imbolc, which like all Pagan and Wiccan holidays begins at sundown on the day before, is a celebration of fire and light and the return of life. It is also the holy day of St. Brigid, the Goddess of fire, healing, and fertility. Wicca is the common term for many different traditions of Neo-Pagan nature religions that celebrate seasonal and life cycles and revere a Goddess and a God. Most Wiccans celebrate eight Sabbats, or days of power, that comprise the Wheel of the Year: Samhain (the Wiccan New Year), Yule, Imbolc, Ostara, Beltaine, Litha, Lughnasadh and Mabon. Wiccans also celebrate thirteen Esbats, or ritual observances of the full moon, every year.

**February 3: Suyapa Day: Honduras.** This commemorates the day the 18th-century statue of the Virgin of Suyapa, the Patroness of Honduras, was discovered. Every year in early February the statue, which is considered to have miraculous powers, is toured through various parts of the country where thousands of people make pilgrimages to visit it.

**February 14: Valentine's Day: United States.** The origins of this day are confused. There appear to have been two or three early Christian martyrs named Valentine. One was probably executed on February 14. One man named Valentine secretly married young sweethearts in opposition to the Roman Emperor Claudius' ban on marriage (a policy designed to prevent young men of military age from forming family ties). Another legend

**SPECIAL NOTE:** These descriptions are from the 2012 Multicultural Resource Calendar © 2012 by Diversity Resources, Inc.™, Amherst, MA which can be found on Student Life's Mosaic Center webpage (use your UMBC username and password to access the calendar, [http://www.diversityresources.com/aa\\_gsr/main\\_month.php](http://www.diversityresources.com/aa_gsr/main_month.php)). If there are any incorrect dates or descriptions, please contact the calendar

mentions flowers grown by Valentine and given to children. When Valentine was imprisoned the children remembered him by throwing nosegays and notes into his prison window. These were the original Valentine greetings.

**February 15: Nirvana (Buddha's Death): Buddhist.** In the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, this day marks the death of Buddha in 483 B.C.E. and commemorates his attainment of final Nirvana. The date is based on the Japanese Buddhist calendar.

**February 20: Great Lent begins: Coptic Orthodox Christian.** (m) Also known as the Great Fast, this begins the Lenten season for the Coptic Orthodox Christians, who follow the Julian calendar. It begins with a one-week preparatory fast, followed by a 40-day fast commemorating Christ's fasting on the mountain. The fast of Great Lent, which includes Sundays, officially ends on the Saturday before Holy Week, known as Lazarus Saturday, although fasting continues during Holy Week (Pascha). During this time, no animal products, such as meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, or butter, are allowed. Moreover, no food or drink may be taken between sunrise and sunset.

**February 26: Festival of Ayyam-i-Ha (Intercalary Days) (2/26-3/1): Baha'i.** The days from February 26 to March 1 adjust the Baha'i year, which consists of 19 months with 19 days each month, to the solar calendar. These days are celebrated as the Festival of Ayyam-i-Ha and are observed with gift-giving, special acts of charity, and preparation for fasting that precedes the new year. (See discussion under Holidays and Work Schedules.)

**February 27: Beginning of Great Lent: Eastern Orthodox Christian.** Also known as Clean Monday in Greece and Green Monday in Cyprus, this begins the Lenten season based on the Julian calendar followed by Eastern Orthodox Christians. Eastern Orthodox Lent, known as Great Lent, includes Sundays and officially ends on Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday, although fasting continues during Holy Week. While many people no longer fast for forty days, most people observe the fast strictly for the two weeks preceding Easter. In Greece, a carnival season called apokria precedes the start of Lent. Apokria begins with a feast of roast kid or lamb, followed by two weeks of festivities including parades of masked figures. The third week begins with Tyrini—Cheese Sunday—when cheese, a food forbidden during Lent, is eaten in pies. The following day is Clean Monday, and is a national holiday when many children appear in their Carnival costumes. The pastime of the day is flying special hexagonal kites decorated with geometric designs. Traditionally, all animal foods including fish are forbidden during Lent and some people also eschew oil. Vegetables and legumes are therefore the main Lenten foods of Greece, with a little shellfish—permitted because, unlike fin fish, it lacks blood. This day is a national holiday in Greece and Cyprus.