Religious, Cultural & Ethnic Holidays & Days of Observance

December 2018

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 December 2018. 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 Multicultural Resource Calendar located on the Office of Student Life’s Mosaic Center website: http://www.diversityresources.com/aa_gsr/index.php?key=adCaO2Shix6u

Thank you,
The Mosaic: Center for Culture and Diversity, Interfaith Center, and Queer Student Lounge Staff

Dec 2- Christian : Advent begins (through 12/24)
Advent, which means "coming" or "arrival," marks the beginning of the Western Christian ecclesiastical year. It begins on the Sunday nearest to the Feast of St. Andrew on November 30, and continues through Christmas Eve, encompassing four Sundays. Originally observed with fasting and penitence as a period during which converts to Christianity prepared themselves for baptism, Advent became during the Middle Ages a time to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. Advent is now a solemn yet joyful season of prayer, reflection, and preparation for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ in his First Advent, as well as a time to ready oneself in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming. The Orthodox Christian churches do not have an Advent season, but rather have Winter Lent, a 40-day Lenten season of fasting, prayer, and reflection ending on Christmas Eve. (See entries for Winter Lent (Nativity Fast): Coptic Orthodox Christian and Winter Lent (Nativity Fast): Eastern Orthodox Christian.)

Dec 2- Jewish : Hanukkah (12/2-12/10)
This holiday, often misunderstood as the "Jewish Christmas" since it occurs in December, commemorates the victory of the Jewish people, led by the Maccabee family, over the Syrian Greeks in 165 B.C.E. This victory marked the end of a three-year period of religious persecution, restored Jewish independence, and ensured the survival of monotheism (belief in one God). According to legend, when the Jews returned to cleanse their Temple, which had been defiled by pagan worship, they discovered only enough consecrated oil to keep the holy lamp burning for one day. However, the oil miraculously lasted eight days, the time needed to secure a new supply. Hanukkah is celebrated by lighting a candle on each of the eight days of celebration. On the first night, one candle is lit in a branched candlestick called a menorah, and an additional
A candle is lit each night until the eighth night. This ceremony has given the holiday the additional name of "Festival of Lights." Hanukkah is joyfully celebrated. Special Hebrew hymns, including "Rock of Ages," are sung, family members exchange gifts, and children play with a dreidel, a four-sided top inscribed with the Hebrew letters for "a great miracle happened there." Potato pancakes, or latkes, are a traditional food treat, with the oil used for cooking recalling the oil in the sacred lamp. The holiday ends at sundown on the eighth day.

**Dec 5- Netherlands : Saint Nicholas Day**
This begins the Christmas season in the Netherlands. On this day Saint Nicholas, "Sinterklaas," arrives. Cities have parades where he comes riding on a white horse or in a barge or even on a motorcycle wearing a bishop's hat and a red cape. That evening, adults have parties and exchange gifts, while children set out shoes filled with carrots and hay for Saint Nicholas' horse. In the morning, they find the shoes filled with gifts.

**Dec 8- Buddhist : Bodhi Day (Buddha's Enlightenment)**
Among Mahayana Buddhists, this holiday celebrates Buddha's attaining understanding of the truth of existence, freeing himself from all human suffering, and finding perfect happiness. The date is based on the Japanese Buddhist calendar.

**Dec 8- Roman Catholic : Feast of the Immaculate Conception**
This celebrates the Roman Catholic belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived free from original sin.

**Dec 12- Mexico : Fiesta de Guadalupe**
This is the feast day of the patron saint of Mexico. The shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is Mexico's most sacred religious site. December 12 is the anniversary of the day on which Juan Diego, an Aztec peasant, is said to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary, who ordered him to go and tell the Bishop of Mexico to build a church on that spot. Recognizing the Festival/Holiday: In both Puerto Rican and Mexican communities, this is a day when people go to church for prayers honoring the Virgin. Often a procession is formed to the church and a fiesta is held in the evening, sometimes involving scenes created to depict el milagro (the miracle).

**Dec 13- Sweden : Santa Lucia**
This holiday, also celebrated in states such as Minnesota where there are many Scandinavian communities, honors an Italian martyr named Saint Lucia. Like many winter festivals, its central feature is lights. In Sweden, a young girl wearing a white robe and a crown of seven lighted candles serves special buns and coffee.
Dec 16- **Mexico : Las Posadas (12/16-12/24)**
Las Posadas, celebrated from December 16 to December 24, commemorates Mary and Joseph's effort to find an inn and the events associated with the birth of Jesus. The holiday takes its name from the Spanish word posadas, meaning "a dwelling." A candlelight procession represents the star in heaven that guided the three wise men on their way. After a religious ceremony on December 24, there is a traditional celebration centering on the piñata, a decorated clay container filled with toys and candy. A child is blindfolded, turned around a few times, and given a wooden stick and three chances to break the piñata. When the piñata is broken, the children scramble for the candy.

Dec 21- **Pagan and Wiccan : Yule begins at sundown**
In most forms of Wicca, this holiday is celebrated at the winter solstice as the rebirth of the great horned hunter god, who is viewed as the newborn solstice sun. The method of gathering for this sabbat varies by practitioner. Some have private ceremonies at home, while others do so with their coven or fellowship.

Yule or Yuletide originated as a festival observed by the historical Germanic peoples. Scholars have connected the celebration to the Wild Hunt, the god Odin, and the pagan Anglo-Saxon Mōdraniht.

Dec 25- **Christian : Christmas**
Most Christians observe Christmas to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and it is celebrated as a public holiday in many countries worldwide. Eastern Orthodox Christians who follow the Orthodox New Calendar, such as the Greek and Cypriot Orthodox Churches, observe Christmas on this date. However, other Eastern Orthodox Christians and Coptic Orthodox Christians follow the Orthodox Old Calendar, or Julian calendar, and celebrate Christmas on January 7. The Armenian Apostolic Church observes Christmas on January 6. Christmas is a family-oriented holiday with special foods, colorful decorations, and exchanging of gifts. Families often have their own traditions, especially concerning when gifts are exchanged and what foods are served.

Dec 26- **Roman Catholic : St. Stephen's Day**

Dec 28- **Mexico, Morocco : Holy Innocents' Day**
In an attempt to find the infant Jesus and kill him, King Herod ordered the killing of children in Bethlehem. Current research indicates that between 6 and 20 children were killed.