Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Islam Fact Sheets

Ramadan

Ramadan Mubarak – Blessed Ramadan!

During the academic year, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This month is a foundational pillar of practicing Islam, observed by over a billion Muslims worldwide. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is a month-long observance of fasting, prayer, and reflection that commemorates the revelation of the Qur'an. Key highlights include Laylatul Qadr (The Night of Power), which occurs during the last ten nights of the month and is considered the night the Qur'an was revealed. The month is immediately followed by Eid al-Fitr, a celebratory holiday where community members gather for communal prayers, feasting, and exchanging gifts.

2. How is Ramadan observed?

Muslims observe Ramadan by fasting from dawn to sunset, abstaining from all food, drink (including water), smoking, and sexual intimacy. This devotional act is intended to cultivate God-consciousness, devotion, purification of the soul, and increased empathy.

In addition to fasting, many Muslims:

- Perform extra nightly prayers called Taraweeh.
- Increase acts of charity and community service.
- Devote significant time to reciting and studying the Qur'an.
- Practice heightened self-restraint, kindness, and patience. Exceptions to fasting are made for children, the elderly, those who are ill, travelers, and women who are pregnant, nursing, or menstruating.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this month. Because observers fast during daylight hours, they may experience lower stamina or energy levels by the afternoon. Common concerns for students include conflicts between early morning exams, evening exams, or late-night study sessions and Iftar (the meal to break the fast at sunset) or Taraweeh prayers. Additionally, the final ten nights are often marked by increased late-night worship, which may substantially impact sleep schedules.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar. Mention in your syllabus that you are aware of Ramadan and invite students to discuss potential accommodations for exams or assignments.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Ramadan Mubarak” (Blessed Ramadan) or “Ramadan Kareem”(Generous Ramadan). Be mindful of scheduling events centered around food during daylight hours.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for exams that conflict with Iftar or late-night prayers. Work with students to find flexibility in fulfilling class responsibilities during this period. Students may differ in the sort of accommodations and alternative timings they find appropriate.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC) and the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.
- **Source**: **What is Ramadan? | Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Jumu’ah

Jumu’ah Mubārak – Blessed Jumu’ah!

Every week, Muslim students, faculty, and staff gather for Jumu'ah, the congregational Friday prayer. Considered the "best day on which the sun has risen," Friday serves as a weekly Eid (celebration through congregation) for the Muslim community, providing a vital opportunity for unity, reflection, and spiritual renewal. Here’s how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Jumu'ah?

Jumu'ah is a special congregational prayer held every Friday that replaces the regular Dhuhr (midday) prayer. Its importance is deeply rooted in the Qur'an, which commands believers to "hasten to the remembrance of Allah" when the call for Friday prayer is made. The service is unique because it includes a khutbah (sermon), which is a mandatory component where an Imam provides guidance on faith, morality, and social issues. The prayer timing occurs shortly after the sun passes its zenith and continues until the mid-afternoon (Asr) prayer time.

2. How is Jumu'ah observed?

Attending the Friday prayer in congregation is an obligatory duty (Fard) for adult Muslim men who are residents and able to attend, while women are also welcome to participate. Preparation and participation involve several key traditions (Sunnahs):

- Performers are highly encouraged to take a ritual bath (ghusl) before attending.
- It is traditional to wear clean, high-quality clothes and, for men, to wear "itr (cologne)".
- Attendees must listen to the two-part sermon with complete silence and attention; talking or using cell phones during the khutbah is prohibited and can invalidate the reward of the prayer.
- Many observe the day by reciting Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave) from the Qur'an and increasing blessings (Salawat) upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

- Arriving early at the mosque is a valued practice that brings increased spiritual reward.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Because Jumu'ah is a weekly obligation that must be performed in a congregation, hundreds of community members will need to leave campus or their workstations to visit a mosque or designated prayer hall during the midday period.

- The prayer and sermon typically take place between 12:00 PM and 4:00 PM, depending on the time of year.
- Students may face challenges with classes, exams, or labs scheduled during this window.
- Staff and faculty may require a dedicated break during the early afternoon to fulfill this weekly religious requirement.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Recognize that Friday afternoon is a peak time for religious observance for your Muslim colleagues and students.

Be Inclusive

Use the greeting “Jumu’ah Mubārak” (Blessed Friday). When possible, avoid scheduling mandatory department meetings, exams, or "lunch and learn" sessions during the Friday midday prayer window.

Be Accommodating

Understand that the khutbah (sermon) is an essential part of the prayer service, not just an optional lecture. Allow students and staff the flexibility to travel to and from prayer services, which may require 60 to 120 minutes of absence from campus.

5. Resources

- For more information or to find local prayer times, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and the NAIF Center.
- **Source:** **Jummah Friday Prayer Explained With Key Sunnahs - NAIF Center**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Holy Day of Arafah

A Blessed Day of Forgiveness and Mercy

During the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe the Day of ʿArafah. Considered the "best day of the year," it is a time of intense worship and spiritual rejuvenation for the global Muslim community. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Day of ʿArafah?

The Day of ʿArafah takes place on the 9th day of Dhul Hijjah, the final month of the Islamic calendar. It is the pinnacle and heart of the Hajj pilgrimage; while millions of pilgrims gather on the sacred mountain of ʿArafah to supplicate to Allah, Muslims worldwide join them in spirit through prayer, reflection and fasting. It is historically significant as the day Allah revealed the completion of the religion of Islam.

2. How is this day observed?

For those not performing the Hajj pilgrimage, the day is marked by several devotional acts:

- Fasting is highly recommended, as the Prophet ﷺ stated it "expiates the sins of the previous year and the coming year". The fast is typically broken with a celebratory communal meal with family and community. The evening marks the first night of Eid al-Adha.
- Observers spend the day in intense prayer and remembrance (*dhikr*), affirming the oneness of God and seeking forgiveness and making du'a (prayers for the future, including for health, safety, justice, family, and community).
- Many reflect on the Prophet's ﷺ final sermon delivered on this day, which emphasized core values including racial equality, the fair treatment of women, and social justice.
- It is a day to acknowledge shortcomings, seek forgiveness, make a personal commitment to enhance one's spiritual life, and engage in acts of service.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will balance their academic and professional responsibilities with these intense religious obligations.

- The dates change each year and will continue to shift over the coming years because the Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle.
- Because many students and staff will be fasting from dawn until sunset, they may experience lower stamina, especially in the late afternoon.
- The entirety of the Day of Arafah is sacred, which may lead students to seek quiet spaces for reflection or time away from social gatherings.
- Students may request accommodations for exams, required meetings, or assignments that fall on this day to prioritize their spiritual standing and worship.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar. Include a note in your syllabus acknowledging the day and inviting students to discuss potential accommodations for assignments or exams.

Be Inclusive

While there is no standard greeting like "Happy New Year," acknowledging the significance of the day to Muslim colleagues is welcomed through well wishes such as, “may your dua’ be granted”. Be mindful of scheduling food-centered events or high-stakes meetings during this time.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need flexibility to fulfill their devotional goals, such as attending to extra prayers or breaking their fast at sunset. Faculty and staff should work with individuals to find meaningful arrangements if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.

- **Source**: [What to Do on the Day of ʿArafah: Making the Most of a Blessed Day | Blog]

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eid al-Ghadeer

Eid Mubarak – Blessed Eid!

During the academic year, Shia Muslim students, faculty, and staff observe Eid al-Ghadeer, a significant feast day known as the day faith was perfected. It is celebrated as the "greatest Eid of Allah" and serves as a time of joy and communal reflection on leadership and divine guidance. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Eid al-Ghadeer?

Eid al-Ghadeer commemorates the event of Ghadīr Khumm, which occurred in the year 10 AH following Prophet Muḥammad's (ṣ) final Hajj. At a pond called Ghadīr Khumm, the Prophet (ṣ) delivered a historic sermon where he took the hand of Imām ʿAlī (ʿa), raised it high, and declared: *"O people, for whomsoever I am the master (mawlā), ʿAlī is also their master"*. This event is regarded by Shia Muslims as the formal declaration of Imām ʿAlī's divine appointment as the Prophet's successor in spiritual and political leadership. It takes place on the 18th of Dhul Ḥijjah on the Islamic calendar.

2. How is this holiday observed?

Eid al-Ghadeer is celebrated with diverse customs that bring families and communities together to honor the concept of *Wilāyah* (divine authority and guardianship). Common observances include:

- Devotees reflect on the qualities of a true leader, such as justice, bravery, and trustworthiness as exemplified by Imām ʿAlī (ʿa).
- Families host gatherings to read stories about the event of Ghadeer and the life of the Prophet (ṣ) and his family.
- It is highly recommended to give gifts and treats to loved ones on this special day.
- Celebrants may engage in service or donations to support those in need, following the selfless example of the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa).

- Observances include specific prayers, feasts, and reciting supplications of praise and thanks to Allah.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Muslim community members will seek to balance their academic and professional roles with this profound spiritual occasion.

- Students and staff may request to take the first day of the celebration off to participate in communal prayers and festivities.
- When planning events around this time, be aware that many Muslims follow halal food guidelines. Providing vegetarian or pescatarian options without alcohol or cross-contamination can help meet these standards.
- Because the day involves increased prayer and reflection, community members may need access to reflection rooms on campus.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the 18th of Dhul Ḥijjah on your calendar. Include information in your syllabus regarding potential religious absences and invite students to discuss accommodations for exams or assignments.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Eid Mubarak” (Blessed Eid). When hosting events, inquire about dietary preferences to ensure a welcoming environment for those following halal standards.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively with individuals to find solutions if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and the Al-Kisa Foundation. **Source**: **Eid Ghadeer: A Simple Guide**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eid al-Fitr

Eid Mubarak – Blessed Eid!

During the academic year, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe Eid al-Fitr, one of the two major celebrations in the Islamic calendar. This "celebration of breaking the fast" marks the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan and is a time of immense joy, gratitude, and community. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Eid al-Fitr?

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan and the beginning of the tenth month of the Islamic (Hijri) calendar, Shawwal. It is a day in which the community gathers to celebrate the 29-30 days of spiritual renewal, acts of service, and collective upliftment characterized by Ramadan. It is traditionally celebrated over three days.

2. How is this holiday observed?

Eid is a day of celebration, rest, and good tidings. It is forbidden to fast on this day. Key observances include:

- Every Muslim is encouraged to perform a special prayer in congregation with their community shortly after sunrise.
- Celebrants prepare by cleaning their homes, bathing, and wearing 'itr' (perfume/cologne) and their best and/or new outfits.
- Before the Eid prayer, self-supporting adults must pay Zakat al-Fitr, a charitable donation of food or its monetary equivalent to ensure those less fortunate can also celebrate.
- The day is characterized by visiting loved ones, sharing gifts, and enjoying festive traditional meals and desserts.
- Many follow the Sunnah of traveling to the prayer using one route and returning home via a different one.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.

- The dates change each year and will continue to shift over the coming years because the Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle.
- Many students, faculty, and staff will request the first day of the celebration off to participate in morning congregational prayers and family gatherings.
- Some students may return to their home communities to celebrate with family, requiring time for travel and preparation before the holiday begins.
- Common concerns include conflicts with exam schedules, required meetings, and social or recruitment events scheduled on the day of Eid.
- Colleagues and remote students in Muslim-majority countries will likely observe national holidays during this time.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the expected date on your calendar and mention it in your syllabus. Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, dates shift annually and the exact start depends on the moon sighting, or lunar calculation, depending on the community.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Eid Mubarak” (Blessed Eid) or “Happy Eid”. Avoid scheduling exams, major assignments, or mandatory meetings on this day.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments. Work collaboratively with students and staff to find meaningful accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to celebrate the holiday, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and Islamic Relief Worldwide.

- **Source**: **Eid al-Fitr 2026**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eid al-Adha

Eid Mubarak – Blessed Eid!

During the academic year, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe Eid al-Adha, the second of the two major religious holidays in the Islamic calendar. Known as the "Celebration of the Sacrifice," it is a time of profound devotion, community gathering, and charity. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Eid al-Adha?

Eid al-Adha honors the willingness of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (peace be upon him) to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God. It is intrinsically linked to Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, which millions of Muslims perform each year to commemorate Prophet Abraham's (peace be upon him) story. The holiday falls on the 10th day of the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Dhul Hijjah.

2. How is this holiday observed?

Eid al-Adha is traditionally celebrated over four days. Key observances include:

- Community members gather for a special congregational prayer on the first morning of the holiday.
- Following the prayer, those who are financially able offer a sacrifice of a sheep, goat, cow, or camel (or other animal) to remember Prophet Ibrahim's (peace be upon him) sacrifice. The meat is then equally shared in 3 parts with family, friends, and those in need.
- Celebrants prepare by cleaning their homes, bathing, and wearing 'itr' (perfume/cologne) and their best and/or new outfits.
- The day is characterized by visiting loved ones, sharing gifts, and enjoying festive traditional meals and desserts.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.

- The dates change each year and will continue to shift over the coming years because the Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle.
- Many students and staff will request the first day of the celebration off to attend morning prayers and participate in family feasts.
- Some students may return to their home communities to celebrate, requiring travel time before the holiday begins.
- Colleagues and remote students in Muslim -majority countries will likely observe national holidays during this time.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar. Mention in your syllabus that you are aware of the holiday and invite students to discuss potential accommodations for exams or assignments that fall during this window.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Eid Mubarak” (Blessed Eid), “Eid Sa'id” (Happy Eid), or “Kul 'am wa antum bikhair” (Wishing you goodness every year). Avoid scheduling major meetings or social gatherings during the three days of celebration.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively with individuals to find meaningful solutions if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), and the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC). Global information is available through Islamic Relief Worldwide.
- **Source**: **Eid al-Adha 2026**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Birthday of ‘Ali ibn Abi Tālib

Happy Hazrat Ali’s Birthday!

During the academic year, Shia Muslim students, faculty, and staff celebrate the birth of Imam Ali ibn Abi Tālib (p), the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Regarded as the first Imam by the Shia community, his life serves as a timeless inspiration of kindness, generosity, and unwavering faith. Here’s how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Birth Anniversary of Imam Ali?

This occasion honors the birth of Imam Ali ibn Abi Tālib (p), an essential historical and spiritual figure in Islam who is celebrated on the 13th day of the Islamic month of Rajab. He is widely revered for his character and devotion; a pivotal moment in his life is the "Ring of Generosity," where he provided for a man in need even while immersed in prayer. This act led to the revelation of the Verse of Wilaya (5:55) in the Quran, which elevated his status as a leader and an example for all believers.

2. How is this anniversary observed?

The Shia community observes this day with joy and communal reflection. Common practices include:

- Families and friends gather for large meals and celebrations.
- Mosques are often decorated to mark the festive atmosphere of the birth anniversary.
- Community members come together to share stories of Imam Ali’s life, emphasizing his compassion and selflessness.
- The day includes special prayers and gatherings centered on religious education and community cohesion.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will look to balance their academic and professional responsibilities with these important spiritual celebrations.

- Shia colleagues and students may request to take the day off to celebrate with their families and participate in mosque services.
- Some students may travel to nearby Shia Islamic centers or home communities to observe the anniversary.
- For international students and staff, it is important to note that this is a public holiday in countries like Iran and regions of India.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the 13th of Rajab on your calendar. Since the Islamic calendar is lunar, the date varies annually on the Gregorian calendar.

Be Inclusive

Wishing followers a “Happy Hazrat Ali’s Birthday” is a welcomed gesture. Avoid scheduling high-stakes exams or mandatory meetings on this day when possible.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may seek alternative arrangements for class responsibilities or assignments. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively to find meaningful accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students’ Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and the Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya (I.M.A.M.).
- **Source**: **Birth Anniversary of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (p), 1446 A.H. - IMAM-US.org**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Assalaamu Aleikum — Peace be unto you!

Muslim students, faculty, and staff commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the final prophet of the Abrahamic tradition. This occasion, often referred to as the Mawlid, is a time for the global Muslim community to reflect on his legacy as a role model for humanity. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad?

Mawlid an-Nabi commemorates the birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which occurred in the 6th century in Makkah during the "Year of the Elephant". Observed on the 12th day of the Islamic month of Rabi' ul-Awwal, this birth is regarded as a pivotal moment that changed the face of history and is considered one of the greatest blessings to the Muslim community. Within the Islamic tradition, he is revered as the final prophet who confirmed the monotheistic teachings of those before him, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (peace be upon them).

2. How is this day observed?

Hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide celebrate this honorable memory as a "rewardable deed" and a way to praise Allah for the gift of the Prophet ﷺ. Common observances include:

- The day is marked by gatherings where scholars and community members share stories of the Prophet's ﷺ life, legacy, and character.
- Celebrants engage in collective praise and prayers, commemorating the glorified memory of his birth.
- Many cultures celebrate by visiting family and friends at home or attending mosque gatherings and share a variety of sweets.
- While the 12th is the primary date, celebrations and educational can often extend throughout the entire month of Rabi' ul-Awwal.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members endeavor to balance their academic and professional roles with these significant spiritual commemorations.

- For many, the Mawlid is a time of deep cultural and spiritual identity, requiring time for reflection and community engagement.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the 12th of Rabi' ul-Awwal on your calendar. Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, the date shifts by approximately 10-11 days each year.

Be Inclusive

Acknowledge the etiquette of referring to the Prophet with notations of respect, such as [peace be upon him].

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need flexibility to attend religious lectures or gatherings. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively to find meaningful accommodations for exams or assignments if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students' Association), and the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC). Historical and biographical information is available through the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP).
- **Source:** **A Brief Biography about our Beloved Prophet Muhammad - Association of Islamic Charitable Projects in USA**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Arbaʿein

During the academic year, Shia Muslim students, faculty, and staff observe Arbaʿein, a profound spiritual occasion marking the 40th day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (as), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Arbaʿein?

The word Arbaʿein means "forty" in Arabic. It marks forty days after the Day of Ashura, the day on which Imam Hussain (as) was martyred during the Battle of Karbala. This period is a time of intense mourning, love, and reflection on the ultimate sacrifice made by Imam Hussain (as) to uphold the values of justice, truth, and faith. It is observed annually on the 20th day of the Islamic month of Safar.

2. How is Arbaʿein observed?

Arbaʿein is characterized by one of the largest peaceful annual gatherings in the world: the Arbaʿein Walk.

- Millions of pilgrims travel by foot to the holy shrine of Imam Hussain (as) in Karbala, Iraq. The most common route begins in Najaf and covers approximately 80 kilometers (50 miles), typically taking two to three days.
- The journey is defined by hospitality and charity. Locals and organizations set up mowakeb(tents) along the route to provide free food, water, medical aid, and shaded rest areas for the millions of travelers (zuwaar).
- For those unable to attend the walk, the day is marked by reciting the Ziyarat of Arbaʿein, a special prayer affirming loyalty to the ideals of Imam Hussain (as).
- The observance brings together people of all ages, backgrounds, and even different faiths in a collective expression of devotion and solidarity against oppression.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members may endeavor to balance their academic and professional roles with this significant period of mourning and pilgrimage.

- Because Arbaʿein is the largest annual pilgrimage, attracting over 20 million participants in recent years, some students and staff may request time off to travel to Iraq for the walk.
- Those remaining on campus may participate in local commemorations and late-night services, which can impact their daily schedules.
- Students may seek quiet spaces or reflection rooms on campus to recite prayers and engage in spiritual reflection.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar, noting that it varies annually based on the lunar calendar. Mention in your syllabus that you are aware of the observance and invite students to discuss potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that Arbaʿein is a solemn time of mourning rather than a celebratory holiday; while there is no common greeting, acknowledging its importance to Shia colleagues is meaningful. Avoid scheduling mandatory social events or high-stakes exams during the peak of the observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that the pilgrimage is a once-in-a-lifetime spiritual goal for many. Faculty and staff should work with students to find alternative arrangements for assignments or class responsibilities if they are participating in the pilgrimage or local observances.

5. Resources

- Campus and community resources for information or support include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students' Association), the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), and The Zahra Trust.

- **Source**: [The Significance of the Arba'een Walk: A Journey of Love, Service, and Devotion - The Zahra Trust USA]

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Laylatul Qadr - Nights of Ramadan

Ramadan Mubarak – Blessed Ramadan!

During the final ten days of Ramadan, Muslim students, faculty, and staff observe Laylatul Qadr, the most sacred night in the Islamic calendar. This period is a time of intense spiritual cleansing, purification, and increased worship as the month of Ramadan draws to a close. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What are the 23rd and 27th Nights of Ramadan?

Laylatul Qadr, often translated as the Night of Decree or Night of Power, marks the night the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. While the exact date is unknown, the Prophet ﷺ instructed followers to "seek it in the last 10 days, on the odd nights". For the Shia community, the 23rd night holds primary significance, while many in the Sunni community focus on the 27th night. This night is described in the Qur'an as being "better than a thousand months," and it is believed to be the time when an individual's fate for the coming year is decreed.

2. How are these nights observed?

Observance is characterized by staying awake throughout the night to engage in various forms of devotion:

- Muslims perform night prayers, recite the holy Qur'an, and offer nafl (optional)prayers.
- A central practice is seeking forgiveness through sincere *duʿa* (supplication), specifically the prayer: *"O Allah, indeed You are Pardoning and Generous; You love to pardon, so pardon us"*.
- Giving sadaqah (charity) is highly emphasized, as the rewards for righteous acts on this night are equivalent to having performed them for over 83 years.
- Some community members choose to engage in i'tikaf (spend the entire final ten nights in seclusion at a mosque, focusing solely on worship and religious knowledge while refraining from worldly affairs).

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and professional roles with these rigorous nightly obligations.

- Because observers spend much of the night in prayer, they may experience significant fatigue or lower energy levels during the day.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the final ten nights of Ramadan on your calendar, paying particular attention to the odd-numbered nights. Mention in your syllabus that you are aware of Laylatul Qadr and invite students to discuss potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary based on different levels of observance. Avoid scheduling high-stakes exams or major assignments on the mornings following the 23rd or 27th nights.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities due to the physical toll of all-night worship. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively with individuals to find meaningful solutions if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students' Association), and the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC). Global insights on these nights are provided by Islamic Relief Worldwide.
- **Source**: **The spiritual significance of the last 10 nights of Ramadan - Islamic Relief Worldwide**

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

10th Day of Muharram (Ashura)

During the academic year, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe Ashura, the tenth day of the sacred month of Muharram. Muharram marks the beginning of the Islamic new year and is a time of deep historical reflection and spiritual significance. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ashura?

Ashura falls on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Its significance is twofold within the Islamic tradition:

- For Sunni Muslims, Ashura is primarily a day of gratitude commemorating the day Allah granted victory to Prophet Musa (Moses) (peace be upon him) and the Israelites, while many Sunnis also remember the martyrdom of Imam Hussain as a significant historical tragedy.
- For Shia Muslims, Ashura is a solemn day of mourning that marks the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, at the Battle of Karbala. It is a day to contemplate sacrifice, perseverance, and the struggle against worldly corruption.

2. How is this day observed?

Observances vary among Islamic traditions, but generally include:

- Fasting on Ashura is highly recommended and considered the "most excellent fast after Ramadan". It is often performed as an act of gratitude for the victory granted to Prophet Musa (peace be upon him). In addition to Ashura, it is recommended to fast the day before or after Ashura (i.e. the 9th or 11th day).
- For the Shia community, the day is one of intense grief. Mourners gather at mosques for religious lectures and poetic readings that commemorate the life and sacrifice of Imam Hussain.
- Many use this virtuous day to reflect on the power of faith over worldly planning and the inheritance of the earth by the righteous.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this sacred period.

- The dates change each year and will continue to shift over the coming years because the Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle.
- Because many students and staff will be fasting, they may experience lower stamina or energy, particularly in the late afternoon.
- For Shia observing the mourning of Muharram, the day is one of deep emotional and spiritual weight, which may impact their participation in social or high-energy campus activities.
- Shia students and faculty may request to take the day off to attend communal mourning services or to dedicate the day to prayer and reflection.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the 10th of Muharram on your calendar. Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, the exact date is determined by the sighting of the new moon and shifts annually.

Be Inclusive

While there is no common greeting for Ashura, acknowledging the day in your syllabus or at the beginning of the semester shows students you are aware of their obligations.

Be Accommodating

Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary between Sunni and Shia students. Be flexible with exam scheduling or assignment deadlines, especially for those who are fasting or attending lengthy commemorative services.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students' Association), and the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC). Spiritual guidance and historical context are provided by the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA).

- **Source**: [Significance Of Ashura – 10th Of Muharram – Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)]

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

1st of Muharram (Islamic New Year)

A New Year full of peace, happiness, and abundance of Allah!

During the academic year, Muslim students, faculty, and staff will observe the Islamic New Year, marking the beginning of the year in the Hijri calendar. This period, known as the Hijri New Year or Islamic New Year, is a time for remembering, praying, and new beginnings and resolutions. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Islamic New Year?

The Islamic New Year begins on the 1st of Muharram, the first month of Hijri (Islamic) calendar. It commemorates the Hijrah (migration) of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from Makkah to Madinah, an event that symbolizes the birth of the first Muslim state and the start of an organized community. The Hijri calendar is a lunar calendar, meaning its months change seasons from year to year and it is approximately 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar.

2. How is the New Year observed?

Unlike Gregorian New Year celebrations, the Islamic New Year has no established festive rituals; it is primarily a period of reflection and spiritual renewal. Observances include:

- Community members use this time to reflect and make new resolutions.
- Muslims are urged to perform more good deeds, such as extra salah (prayers), recitation of the Qur'an, and giving sadaqah (charity).
- Families may gather for reunions or feasts, and many people share food with those in need to foster compassion.
- While many focus on fasting and historical events during this month, Shia Muslims begin a significant period of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) at the Battle of Karbala.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and professional roles with these essential spiritual practices.

- The dates change each year and will continue to shift over the coming years because the Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycle.
- Some students, faculty, and staff may request the first day of the new year off to focus on prayer and family.
- For Shia community members, the first ten days of Muharram are marked by intense mourning, which may lead to a preference for quiet reflection over high-energy campus social events.
- Because the calendar relies on lunar sightings, the exact start date may vary by 1-2 days depending on the specific locality.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the expected date on your calendar. Recognize that the 1st of Muharram is treated with great sincerity and piety rather than as a typical "party" celebration.

Be Inclusive

Offer greetings wishing celebrants a new year full of peace and happiness. Be mindful when scheduling social events at the start of the month, especially those involving food or loud festivities.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need flexibility for religious services or personal reflection. Faculty and staff should work collaboratively with individuals to find meaningful accommodations if academic conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- For more information or ways to support the community, campus resources include Maize Pages for Muslim Student Groups (e.g., Muslim Coalition, Muslim Students' Association), and the Association of Religious Counselors (ARC). Educational resources are provided by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

- **Source**: [When Is Islamic New Year Celebrated And What Is Its Significance?]

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Christian Fact Sheets

Lent

Have a blessed Lent!

During the spring semester, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Lent, a liturgical season of preparation. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Lent?

Lent is the liturgical season of preparation for the celebration of Easter. It traditionally lasts 40 days, commemorating the time Jesus Christ spent fasting and praying in the desert while enduring temptation. In the Western Church, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday (marked by the receiving of ashes as a sign of repentance) and ends on the evening of Holy Thursday with the beginning of the Sacred Triduum, the three days celebrating the Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

2. How is this season observed?

Lent is characterized by three spiritual pillars: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (charity toward those in need).

- Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for many Christians. Additionally, all Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence, during which many abstain from eating meat.
- It is common for individuals to make a material sacrifice, such as giving up a luxury, specific food, or recreation (like social media), to strengthen their spiritual resolve and focus on prayer.
- Purple (or violet) is the liturgical color used for vestments and decorations to symbolize penance and sacrifice. Special services, such as the Stations of the Cross, are frequently held to meditate on the Passion of Christ.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this period. Students may need time to attend services, especially on Ash Wednesday or during Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter). Common concerns include:

- Requests for vegan or vegetarian menu options, particularly on Fridays when meat is avoided. Might be worth mentioning that fish is a traditional meal during Lenten Fridays.
- Potential conflicts with exams, required meetings, or social gatherings that involve feasting during fasting days or major services.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark dates like Ash Wednesday and Holy Week on your calendar. Note that while Sundays are part of the season, they are considered "little Easters" and are not counted in the 40 days of penance.

Be Inclusive

Offer greetings like “Have a blessed Lent.” Recognize that dietary restrictions may affect participation in campus events involving food, especially on Fridays.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments if they have religious conflicts.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **EWTN Mission – Lent:** Information on Lenten meditations and liturgical rules.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Good Friday

During the spring semester, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Good Friday, a solemn day in the Christian calendar. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Good Friday?

Good Friday is the day when Christians commemorate the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is considered (perhaps "one of" here would be more precise? I guess I don't encounter many who think it "the" holiest day!). While the day commemorates a somber event, it is called "good" because Christians believe Christ's sacrifice opened the gates of heaven and restored humanity's relationship with God.

2. How is this holiday observed?

Good Friday is a sacred day characterized by deep reflection, prayer, and penance.

- Many attend special services that include scripture readings, the Veneration of the Cross, and communal prayers. For Catholics, it is the only day of the year when the Mass is not celebrated, emphasizing a period of mourning.
- Observants may pray the Stations of the Cross, a devotion that follows the events of Jesus' Passion, or spend time in silent prayer meditating on his final words.
- It is traditionally a day of fasting and abstinence from meat as a way to unite with the suffering of Christ.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this time. Because Good Friday services often take place in the afternoon, students and staff may have specific needs, including:

- Requests for the afternoon off to attend religious services or devotions.

- Potential conflicts with exams, required meetings, or assignments due on this solemn day.
- A need for meat-free meal options in campus dining halls.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark Good Friday on your calendar. Note that there is no traditional greeting for this holiday, as it is a day of mourning and solemnity.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that students may be fasting or observing periods of silence. Avoid scheduling major exams, high-stakes meetings, or mandatory social gatherings on this day.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities if they have religious conflicts. Faculty and staff should work with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land:** Information on the spiritual significance of the Passion and Good Friday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Feast of Epiphany

Happy Three Kings Day!

During the winter, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe the Feast of Epiphany, a celebration of the manifestation of Christ to the world. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Feast of Epiphany?

Epiphany (meaning "manifestation" or "sudden insight") is a Christian feast day celebrating the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. The holiday primarily commemorates the visitation of the Magi (the Three Kings or Wise Men), who followed a star to Bethlehem to worship the infant Jesus. In Eastern Christianity and some Western traditions, the feast also recognizes Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan and his first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- While the traditional date is January 6, in the United States, it is celebrated on the first Sunday after January 1.
- A common practice involves the "Epiphany House Blessing," where the head of the household sprinkles holy water and uses blessed chalk to write the year and the initials "C+M+B" above the doorway (e.g., 20+C+M+B+26). The initials represent the Magi (Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar) and the prayer Christus mansionem benedicat ("May Christ bless this house").
- Many cultures celebrate "Three Kings Day" with festive meals, such as eating King cakes or the sweet bread Rosca de Reyes. Children may leave their shoes out for the Three Kings to fill with presents, sometimes leaving grass or water for the kings' camels.
- The gifts brought by the Magi; gold, frankincense, and myrrh are central symbols representing Jesus' identity as King, God, and a mortal man destined for sacrifice.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this period.

- Generally, there is no interruption to normal work or academic activities.
- Because the holiday often falls during the transition between winter break and the start of the winter semester, students may be traveling or participating in final holiday festivities with their families.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar. Recognize that while the winter break may be ending, this is a significant religious conclusion to the Christmas season for many.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Happy Three Kings Day”.

Be Accommodating

As with all religious holidays, be open to students who may need to attend services or who are observing cultural traditions that might conflict with early semester meetings or social gatherings.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **EWTN Mission – Epiphany:** Offers detailed information on liturgical seasons, feasts, and house blessing resources.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eastern Orthodox Pascha

Christ is risen!

During the spring semester, Eastern Orthodox students, faculty, and staff will observe Pascha, which is considered the center of the Orthodox Christian faith. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Pascha?

Pascha (the Greek transliteration for "Passover") is the feast of the Resurrection of the Lord. It celebrates Jesus Christ rising from the dead after three days in the grave, an event that Christians believe fulfilled prophecies and serves as the foundation of their belief, life, and practice. It is the most important "Great Feast" for Orthodox Christians.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Orthodox churches calculate the date of Pascha using the Julian calendar, which usually results in the celebration falling one to five weeks later than the Western Easter.
- The feast is the culmination of twelve weeks of preparation, including Great Lent and Holy Week. This journey is marked by repentance, prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. During the 40 days of Lent, many faithful avoid meat and dairy products.
- Celebrations often begin late Saturday night with the Midnight Office and Paschal Matins, featuring candlelight processions around the church and the joyous singing of the Paschal troparion.
- Following the Divine Liturgy, the long fast is broken with a festive meal. Baskets of food, including meat, cheese, and a cake-like bread called Kulitch, are traditionally blessed. Red-dyed eggs are also exchanged to symbolize new life received through the blood of Christ.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout the Lenten season and Holy Week.

- While Pascha always falls on a Sunday, the preceding Holy Week is filled with many church services that may conflict with evening classes or meetings.
- Students may return to their home communities to celebrate the feast with their families, which may require travel time.
- Students may face conflicts with exams, required meetings, or assignments due during the solemn final days of Holy Week.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date of the Orthodox Pascha on your calendar. Recognize that students may be observing strict dietary restrictions in the weeks leading up to the holiday.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Christ is risen!” (to which the response is “Indeed he is risen!”) or simply wish them a "Happy Easter". Invite students to discuss any needed accommodations early in the semester.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments due to religious conflicts or travel.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Orthodox, U-M:** A resource for connecting with Orthodox student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **OrthodoxWiki:** Provides detailed information on the history, hymns, and liturgical traditions of Pascha.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eastern Orthodox Holy Friday

Good Pascha!

During the spring semester, Orthodox Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Holy Friday (also known as Great Friday), the most somber day of the liturgical year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Holy Friday?

Holy Friday is the day Christians annually commemorate the crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church views this not merely as a historical remembrance but as an immersive liturgical entry into Christ's Passion. It is considered the foundation of salvation, as theology teaches that death itself had to be "invaded from the inside" by God. This holiday is a moveable feast that occurs on the Friday before Pascha (Easter).

2. How is this holiday observed?

Observation of Holy Friday is characterized by deep mourning, strict fasting, and extensive liturgical services.

- The day is marked by three major services: the Royal Hours in the morning, Vespers in the afternoon (commemorating the taking down of the Cross), and the Matins service in the evening.
- The evening service features twelve Gospel readings and a procession with the Epitaphios, an embroidered cloth icon representing Christ's body. The faithful often carry candles and process around the church to symbolize accompanying Christ to the tomb.
- This is a day of very limited food consumption. The fast is traditionally strict, involving abstinence from meat, dairy, fish, oil, and wine.
- Many observant Orthodox Christians refrain from significant work or academic labor on this day in honor of Christ's sacrifice.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this solemn period.

- Because the afternoon Vespers (around 3 p.m.) and the lengthy evening Matins (often two hours or more) are central to the day, students and staff may need time away from campus.
- The combination of strict fasting and long periods of standing during services can lead to fatigue.
- Because Orthodox churches calculate the date using the Julian calendar, Holy Friday usually occurs after the Western Christian observance.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the Orthodox date for Holy Friday on your calendar. Mention in your syllabus that you are aware of these observances and invite students to discuss needed accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that there is no joyful traditional greeting, though some may say “Good Pascha” in anticipation of the Resurrection. Avoid scheduling exams, high-stakes meetings, or social gatherings involving food on this day.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments due to religious conflicts. Faculty and staff should work with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Orthodox, U-M**: A resource for connecting with Orthodox student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M**: Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church:** Provides detailed information on the specific services and theology of Holy Friday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eastern Orthodox Christmas

Christ is Born!

During the winter, Orthodox Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Christmas (the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord), a joyous feast celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Eastern Orthodox Christmas?

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem as recorded in the Christian Scriptures. While many Western churches celebrate on December 25, many Eastern Orthodox churches use the Julian Calendar. Because of a thirteen-day difference between the Julian and Gregorian (Western) calendars, Orthodox Christmas falls on January 7. For believers, this holiday marks the profound moment when the Son of God became human.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The holiday is preceded by a 40-day period of preparation known as Advent or the Nativity Fast, during which many faithful fast from certain foods to prepare spiritually for the celebration.
- The arrival of Christmas on December 25 (Julian) begins a new liturgical period. This leads into a 12-day festal period of "great joy and celebration" that bridges the Nativity with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord (Theophany/Epiphany) on January 6.
- Observance includes attending special church services on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
- Beyond festivities, it is considered a time to "heal the soul" and focus on peace, joy, and unity.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this period.

- Because the holiday falls on January 7, it often coincides with the beginning of the winter semester or the period when students are traveling back to campus.
- Observers may request the day off to attend services or participate in traditional family meals.
- Conflicts may arise with early semester meetings, orientations, or academic deadlines that fall on January 7.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark January 7 on your calendar. Recognize that while Western Christmas celebrations may have ended, the holiday season is just reaching its peak for Orthodox community members.

Be Inclusive

Offer traditional greetings such as "Christ is Born!" (the traditional response is "Glorify Him!") or a simple "Merry Christmas".

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments if they are traveling or attending religious services.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Orthodox, U-M:** A resource for connecting with Orthodox student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America – Orthodox Christmas:** Offers detailed information on the theological and historical themes of the 12 Days of Christmas.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Eastern Orthodox Beginning of Lent

Have a blessed Lenten journey!

During the winter and spring semesters, Orthodox Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe the beginning of Great Lent, a solemn period of preparation. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Beginning of Great Lent?

Great Lent marks the forty days leading to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, specifically the 40 days before Holy Week. It is a solemn season of prayer and fasting that precedes Pascha (Easter), the most sacred day of the Orthodox Church. The first day of this period is known as Clean Monday, a day designated for spiritual and moral cleansing or purification.

2. How is this period observed?

- The faithful enter a period of purification through increased prayer, meditation, repentance, and attending Lenten religious services. Many begin the season on Sunday night or Monday at a special service centered on asking for forgiveness.
- Great Lent begins with a requirement for fasting. Traditionally, this involves abstention from meat, dairy, eggs, fish, alcohol, and olive oil for the duration of Lent and Holy Week.
- Beloved religious services during this time include the Compline, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, and the Salutations to the Virgin Mary.
- A special unleavened bread is traditionally baked on Clean Monday to mark the start of the fast.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this 40-day period.

- Due to strict fasting rules, vegan catering and menu options are likely needed for students and staff.
- Students may need time to attend frequent religious services, which often take place in the evenings.
- The intensification of prayer and fasting, particularly as the season moves toward Holy Week, may impact students' schedules and energy levels.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date of Clean Monday on your calendar. Note that Orthodox churches calculate the date using the Julian calendar, so it typically occurs after the Western Lenten observance. Let students know in your syllabus that you are aware of these observances.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that dietary restrictions may affect a student's ability to participate in campus events involving food.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments if religious services or fasting obligations create conflicts.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Orthodox, U-M:** A resource for connecting with Orthodox student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America – Great Lent:** Provides detailed information on Lenten observances and the Orthodox calendar.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Orthodox Ascension Day

Happy Ascension Day!

During the spring semester, Orthodox Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Ascension Day, one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ascension Day?

Ascension Day (or the Feast of the Ascension) commemorates the 40th day after Jesus' Resurrection, when He led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, blessed them, and "ascended into heaven". This event is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (1:3-11), as well as the Gospels of Mark and Luke. It signifies the conclusion of Christ's earthly ministry and His commission to the disciples to be His witnesses "to the end of the earth".

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The feast always falls on a Thursday, exactly forty days after Pascha (Easter). Because the date of Pascha changes annually, the date of Ascension Day is also moveable.
- The Orthodox celebration involves a Great Vespers conducted on the evening before the feast, followed by the Matins service and the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom on the day of the feast itself.
- Icons of the feast traditionally show Christ ascending in glory in a "mandorla" (almond-shaped design), blessing the assembly. Below him, the Theotokos (Virgin Mary) and the Apostles represent the Church. Special hymns, such as the Apolytikion and Kontakion, are sung to celebrate Christ uniting the earthly with the heavenly.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this holy day.

- Since the holiday is always on a Thursday, students and staff may have conflicts with daytime classes, exams, or evening meetings if they wish to attend the scheduled liturgical services.
- While significant accommodations are often not required, some individuals may request brief time away from campus to fulfill their religious duties.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark Ascension Day on your calendar. Note that Orthodox churches calculate the date of Pascha using the Julian calendar, so their celebration typically occurs after the Western Christian observance.

Be Inclusive

Offer the greeting “Happy Ascension Day” to those celebrating. Recognize that this is a "Great Feast" representing the sovereignty of Christ over His Church.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments if religious services conflict with their schedule.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America – Ascension:** Offers detailed information on the theology, scriptural readings, and icons of the Ascension.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Easter

Happy Easter!

During the spring semester, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Easter, the most joyous day of the Christian calendar. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Easter?

Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead after three days in the grave. It is considered the "crowning truth" of the faith and the foundation of Christian belief. The resurrection is recorded in the New Testament in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, fulfilling ancient prophecies. While the official language of the Church is Latin (Pascha, derived from the Hebrew Pasch or Passover), the English name is derived from Germanic roots.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The date varies annually between March 22 and April 25, determined by the lunar calendar.
- Christians commemorate the day with special church services and music. In some traditions, the celebration continues through the Easter Octave, an eight-day period ending on Divine Mercy Sunday where each day is treated as a solemnity.
- Easter lilies are widely used as symbols of purity and hope, their trumpet-like shape often associated with announcing the resurrection.
- The season focuses on the "Paschal Mystery", the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection that is believed to liberate humanity from sin and open the way to new life.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.

- Because Easter always falls on a Sunday, special academic accommodations are typically not required for classes or exams.
- Some students and staff may travel to their home communities to celebrate with family, which could affect their availability for Sunday evening campus activities or group work.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar to acknowledge its significance to the Christian community.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Happy Easter” or the traditional exchange: “He is risen!” (to which the response is “He is risen indeed!”).

Be Accommodating

While classroom conflicts are rare, be mindful of religious obligations when scheduling optional group meetings or social gatherings on Easter Sunday.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **EWTN Mission – Easter:** Offers detailed information on the theological significance and liturgical traditions of the Easter season.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Christmas

Merry Christmas!

During the winter break, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Christmas, a central feast celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Christmas?

Christmas, also known as the Nativity of Our Lord, celebrates the point in history when the Son of God became Man for the salvation of humanity. While the precise date of his birth is unknown, Christians celebrate it on December 25. The event is recorded in the "Infancy Narratives" of the Christian Scriptures, specifically in Matthew chapters 1–2 and Luke chapters 1–2.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The holiday is not just a single day; it is preceded by the Season of Advent, a time of preparation, and extends into a liturgical Christmas Season that begins on Christmas Eve and lasts until the Baptism of the Lord in January.
- The name "Christmas" comes from the "Christ Mass," a special public worship service. A popular tradition is Midnight Mass, which many attend even if they are not daily churchgoers.
- The eight days following Christmas are dedicated to an Octave, honoring events like the Feast of the Holy Family and Mary as the Mother of God on January 1.
- Many celebrate by giving gifts (inspired by the Three Wise Men), decorating Christmas trees, and displaying Nativity scenes or crèches that depict the humble birth of Jesus in a manger.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Because Christmas is a national holiday in the United States, the impact on campus operations is significant:

- The U-M Academic Campus is on season break and maintains reduced staffing through the holidays.
- There are no U-M buses or shuttle services on December 24 and 25.
- While campus is on break, community members still endeavor to balance their religious and personal obligations during this period, and many local organizations and businesses remain closed.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark December 25 and the surrounding liturgical season on your calendar. Recognize that for many, the celebration continues well into January.

Be Inclusive

Offer holiday greetings such as “Merry Christmas”. Acknowledge that the season is often a time for family, peace, and "healing the soul".

Be Accommodating

Even during the break, be mindful that students or staff may have religious commitments, such as attending specific services or traveling to be with family.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **EWTN Mission – Christmas:** Provides detailed information on the scriptural, historical, and liturgical significance of the Christmas Season.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Ash Wednesday

I hope you have a meaningful or blessed Ash Wednesday!

During the spring semester, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Ash Wednesday, the day that marks the beginning of the season of Lent. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance when many Christians confess their sins and profess their devotion to God. The holiday emphasizes two primary themes: human mortality and sinfulness before God, both of which are believed to be triumphed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is observed by Catholics and numerous Protestant denominations, including Methodists, Lutherans, and Anglicans, though it is notably not observed by Orthodox churches.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- During worship services, a religious leader places ashes, often made by burning palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday on a worshipper's forehead in the shape of a cross. These ashes serve as an ancient symbol of mourning and a reminder that "you are dust, and to dust you shall return".
- Observers often leave the smudge of ashes on their foreheads throughout the day as a public profession of their faith.
- Ash Wednesday is a day of obligatory fasting and abstinence. The service focuses on corporate and personal acts of repentance as the substance of the first day of Lent.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations on this day.

- Because observers may attend worship services or spend the day in prayer, they may request to suspend work or have the day off. Conflicts may arise with exams, required meetings, or professional networking events.
- Students and staff who are fasting may experience reduced energy levels during classes or campus activities.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar (it occurs 46 days before Easter). Let students know in your syllabus that you are aware of the holiday and invite them to approach you about potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the greeting: “I hope you have a meaningful (or blessed) Ash Wednesday”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary depending on the student's denomination or level of observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to fulfill class responsibilities or turn in assignments. Faculty and staff should work with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **Ask The UMC:** Provides information on the history, liturgy, and significance of Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Ascension Day

Happy Ascension Day!

During the spring semester, Christian students, faculty, and staff will observe Ascension Day, a feast celebrating the conclusion of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ascension Day?

Ascension Day, also known as the Feast of the Ascension, celebrates the moment when Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after his Resurrection. It marks the "definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain". This event is recorded in the New Testament books of Acts, Luke, and Mark. To Christians, it signifies the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom and the moment Jesus commissioned his followers to spread his teachings to all nations.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The feast is traditionally observed on Ascension Thursday, the 40th day after Easter. However, in many regions, including most Catholic dioceses in the United States, the liturgical celebration is transferred to the following Sunday.
- Orthodox Christian churches calculate the date using the Julian calendar, which means their observance often occurs after the Western date.
- The day is typically marked by attending special church services. These services focus on the "Great Commission", Christ's final instructions to his Apostles to be his witnesses "to the end of the earth".
- It is a season of both sorrow (due to Christ's physical absence) and joy (celebrating his divine presence and the promise of the Holy Spirit).

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.

- Traditionally, no major interruptions to work or academic activities are expected for this holiday.
- Because services may be held on a Thursday, some students or staff may request brief time away from campus to attend morning or evening liturgy.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar. Because it is a "moveable feast" tied to the date of Easter, the specific day changes every year.

Be Inclusive

Use the appropriate greeting: “Happy Ascension Day”. Recognition of the holiday helps foster a sense of belonging for those in the Christian community.

Be Accommodating

While significant accommodations are rarely needed, be supportive of students who may need to fulfill religious obligations or attend services that conflict with specific meeting times.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Christian, U-M:** A resource for student organizations and events.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for religious life on campus.
- **EWTN Mission – Ascension:** Offers theological resources and meditations on the significance of the Ascension.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Jain Fact Sheets

Paryushan

Micchami Dukkadam! / Uttam Kshama!

During the early fall semester, Jain students, faculty, and staff observe Paryushan and Das Lakshana, the most sacred periods of the year in Jainism, centered on introspection, self-discipline, fasting, and universal forgiveness. Here is how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Paryushan and Das Lakshana?

Paryushan Parva and Das Lakshana Parva are the premier annual holy observances in Jainism. They represent a dedicated time to consciously slow down worldly activities, practice spiritual austerities (tapa), and engage in deep inner reflection.

- Paryushan (Svetambara tradition): Spans 8 days, concluding with Samvatsari, a solemn day dedicated to seeking and granting forgiveness for any harm caused, intentionally or unintentionally, over the past year.
- Das Lakshana (Digambara tradition): Spans 10 days (often immediately following or overlapping with Paryushan), focusing on ten supreme virtues (Uttam Dharma), culminating in Kshamavani (Forgiveness Day).

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Observants participate in daily or evening rituals of Pratikraman, reviewing past actions, expressing repentance for errors, and rededicating themselves to non-violence (Ahimsa), truthfulness, and compassion toward all living beings.
- Fasting is a central practice. Fasts range from abstaining from food after sunset (Chouvihar) to multi-day fasts where individuals consume only boiled water during daylight hours.
- In accordance with Ahimsa, Jains strictly avoid meat, fish, eggs, and root vegetables (e.g., onions, garlic, potatoes, carrots, radishes). During Paryushan, many observe even stricter dietary restrictions, abstaining from green leafy vegetables or eating a simplified diet to minimize harm to microscopic life.

- On the final culmination day (Samvatsari / Kshamavani), Jains seek forgiveness from family, friends, colleagues, and all living beings using the ancient Prakrit greetings "Micchami Dukkadam" or "Uttam Kshama" ("May all the evil that has been done be forgiven / Supreme Forgiveness").

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Occurring in August or September according to the Jain lunar calendar, these observances frequently coincide with U-M Fall Move-In, Welcome Week, student orientations, or the initial weeks of classes.
- Students undertaking multi-day fasts or extended periods of spiritual reflection may experience reduced physical energy during long lectures, lab sessions, or evening campus events.
- Strict fasting guidelines require that meals or water be consumed only before sunset. Students may need time in the late afternoon or early evening for prayers (Pratikraman) and dinner before dark.
- Some students may travel home on weekends or on the final culmination day to observe rituals with family or at local Jain centers (derasar/ temple).

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these late-August/September dates on your syllabus. Recognizing that intensive fasting coincides with the start of the semester can greatly ease anxiety for observing students.

Be Inclusive

Offer traditional greetings on the culmination days: "Micchami Dukkadam" or "Uttam Kshama."

Be Accommodating

- When hosting campus meetings or catered events, ensure Jain-compliant options are clearly labeled (no root vegetables, onion, garlic, or meat/eggs), and respect that fasting students may decline food or drinks.
- Provide reasonable flexibility for exams, assignment deadlines, or mandatory evening sessions that conflict with sunset fasting schedules or final-day forgiveness rituals.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages - Hindu/Jain, U-M**: A directory for connecting with Jain and Hindu student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M**: Provides support and guidance for the U-M community.
- **Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur – Paryushan**: Provides detailed information on the meaning, importance, and celebration of Paryushan Parva.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Guru Purnima

Happy Guru Purnima!

During the summer months, Hindu, Jain, and South Asian students, faculty, and staff observe Guru Purnima, a sacred day dedicated to honoring those who provide academic knowledge, mentorship, and spiritual guidance. Here is how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Guru Purnima?

In Sanskrit, Guru literally means "the one who dispels darkness and ignorance" (gu \= darkness, ru\= remover). Guru Purnima is a traditional holy day celebrated by students, disciples, and seekers to pay respect and express gratitude to their teachers, mentors, scholars, and spiritual preceptors (gurus).

- Hindu Tradition: Honors spiritual lineages (paramparā), academic mentors, and historical sages such as Veda Vyasa.
- Jain Tradition: Commemorates the day Bhagwan Mahavira appointed his first chief disciple (Gandhara), Indrabhuti Gautama (Gautam Swami), making it a key day to honor Jain monastics and spiritual guides.
- Theravada Buddhist (Āsāḷha Pūjā): "Guru Purnima" as such is not celebrated in Theravada Buddhist cultures. However, the same full moon of Āsāḷha is observed in Theravada traditions as Āsāḷha Pūjā (marking the Buddha's first sermon and the day before the Vassa rains retreat). While Āsāḷha Pūjā is a meaningful monastic holiday, it is secondary in community observance compared to Vesak or the mid-April Solar New Year.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Students and seekers visit their teachers, mentors, or spiritual centers to pay homage, express gratitude, and receive blessings.
- To honor their gurus, students often present modest offerings such as fruit, sweets, flowers, simple clothing, or traditional monetary gifts.

- The day includes prayer, meditation, scriptural study, and rededicating oneself to living the moral and spiritual values imparted by one's teacher.
- Many practitioners adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet or observe a fast on this full moon day.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Occurring on the full moon (purnima) of Ashadha (typically late June or July), observances take place during U-M summer sessions, research lab projects, and internships.
- Because the holiday focuses on the teacher-student relationship, faculty members and academic advisors may receive messages of appreciation or requests for brief visits from South Asian and Jain students.
- Students or staff may request brief flexibility to attend morning or evening devotional services at local temples or centers.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the full moon of Ashadha on your summer calendar and note it in summer syllabi so students know they can reach out regarding potential conflicts.

Be Inclusive

Offer the holiday greeting: "Happy Guru Purnima!" Recognize the deep value placed on mentorship and the student-teacher relationship.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may request flexibility for assignment deadlines or required meetings if attending religious services or visiting mentors.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages (Hindu, Buddhism, Jain), U-M:** Resources for connecting with relevant student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community.
- **Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur – Guru Purnima:** Provides detailed information on the significance of the Guru and the tradition of Guru Purnima.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Jewish Fact Sheets

Yom Kippur

Have an easy fast!

During the fall semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Yom Kippur, the most solemn and important day of the Jewish year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Yom Kippur?

Yom Kippur, known as the Day of Atonement, is a day set aside to "afflict the soul" to atone for the sins of the past year. It is the conclusion of the High Holy Days and is considered the final appeal to God to demonstrate repentance and make amends before the divine judgment for the year is sealed. While other holidays focus on reconciliation between individuals, Yom Kippur focuses on the relationship between the individual and God.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Most Jews observe a complete 25-hour fast, abstaining from both food and water from before sunset on the eve of the holiday until nightfall the following day.
- A significant portion of the day is spent in the synagogue in prayer.
- Traditionally observant Jews refrain from all work, which includes creative activities such as writing, typing, using electronic equipment (phones, computers), and traveling in cars.
- It is customary to wear white to symbolize purity. Many observers also avoid wearing leather shoes, opting for canvas or other non-leather footwear. The holiday ends with a final, long blast of the shofar (ram's horn).

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:
    - For 2026, Yom Kippur begins at sunset on Sunday, September 20, and ends at nightfall on Monday, September 21.

    - For 2027, Yom Kippur begins at sunset on Sunday, October 10, and ends at nightfall on Monday, October 11.
    - For 2028, Yom Kippur begins at sunset on Friday, September 29, and ends at nightfall on Saturday, September 30.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance academic and religious obligations. Under Jewish law, attending classes or taking examinations is not itself classified as prohibited work; however, the activities they typically require, such as writing, using electronics, driving, or other forms of prohibited labor may be restricted.
- Students and staff may need to leave campus early on the eve of the holiday to travel home or partake in a vital pre-fast meal.
- Due to the strict 25-hour fast, observers may have reduced energy levels. Because electronic use is prohibited, they will not be available to respond to emails or attend virtual meetings during the holiday.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar and include them in your syllabus to signal your awareness of students' religious observances.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, using the traditional greeting "Have an easy fast" is appreciated. Avoid scheduling exams, major assignments, or important networking events on these dates.

Be Accommodating

Recognize that requests for accommodations are a genuine wish to observe a holy day. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find alternative arrangements for academic obligations.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.

- **Yom Kippur - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the meaning, traditions, and liturgy of the Day of Atonement.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Sukkot

Chag Sameach! Happy Holiday!

During the fall semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Sukkot, a week-long festival that marks a joyous transition from the solemnity of the High Holy Days. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Sukkot?

Sukkot, known as the Festival of Tabernacles or the Festival of Ingathering, has both historical and agricultural significance. Historically, it commemorates the forty-year period when the Israelites wandered in the desert living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, it is a harvest festival. It is a time of great celebration, referred to in Jewish liturgy as Z'man Simchateinu, or the "Season of our Rejoicing".

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Observants build and "dwell" in a sukkah, a temporary booth with a roof made of organic materials like branches or bamboo. To fulfill the commandment, individuals eat their meals and spend as much time as possible in this structure.
- A central ritual involves the Arba Minim (Four Species): the lulav (palm, willow, and myrtle branches) and the etrog (a citron fruit). These are held together and waved in six directions to symbolize that God is everywhere.
- While Sukkot lasts seven days, the first two days are considered full holy days where "work" is prohibited. This restriction also applies to the concluding holidays of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, which immediately follow Sukkot.
- Families and friends gather for festive meals, often hosted inside the sukkah, to celebrate the bounty of the harvest.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:

    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset September 25, 2026 - nightfall October 2, 2026
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset October 15, 2027 - nightfall October 22, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5789: sunset October 4, 2028 - nightfall October 11, 2028
- On the first two and last two days of this period, traditionally observant Jews refrain from "work," which includes writing, typing, using electronic equipment (computers/phones), and traveling in cars. Attending classes or taking examinations is also classified as work under Jewish Law.
- Thousands of community members will be balancing these religious requirements with their academic schedules. Students may need to leave campus early to reach home before sunset or to help build family sukkahs.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the full period on your calendar, paying special attention to the start and the conclusion when work restrictions are in place.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, using the traditional greeting "Chag Sameach!" (Happy Holiday!) is appreciated. Avoid scheduling major exams, project deadlines, or mandatory networking events during the restricted holy days.

Be Accommodating

Understand that requests for accommodations for Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, or Simchat Torah are a genuine wish to observe the festival. Work proactively with students to provide alternative arrangements for missed classes or assignments.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Sukkot - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the laws, history, and rituals of the festival.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Torah Chag Sameach! Happy Holiday!

During the fall semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, two holidays that mark the conclusion of the autumn festival season. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What are Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah?

These two holidays follow immediately after the seven days of Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret literally means "the assembly of the eighth day" and is considered a holiday in its own right, representing an extra day of intimate celebration with the Creator. Simchat Torah means "Rejoicing in the Torah" and celebrates the completion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah readings. Together, they signify both a conclusion and a new beginning.

2. How are these holidays observed?

- Simchat Torah is a joyous celebration featuring high-spirited singing and dancing in the synagogue. Torah scrolls are carried in seven circuits (processions) around the sanctuary.
- In the synagogue, the final chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy are read, followed immediately by the first chapter of Genesis. This reminds observers that the Torah is a circle that never ends.
- Both are holy days on which "work" is strictly prohibited. This traditional interpretation of work includes creative activities such as writing, typing, using electronic equipment (phones, computers), and traveling in cars.
- While some may still eat in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret, the specific rituals of Sukkot, such as waving the lulav and etrog are no longer performed.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Shemini Atzeret will occur on the following days of the secular calendar:

    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset October 2, 2026 - nightfall October 3, 2026
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset October 22, 2027 - nightfall October 23, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5789: sunset October 11, 2028 - nightfall October 12, 2028
- In Israel, Simchat Torah falls on the same day as Shemini Atzeret. Outside Israel, Simchat Torah will occur on the following days of the secular calendar:
    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset October 3, 2026 - nightfall October 4, 2026
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset October 23, 2027 - nightfall October 24, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5789: sunset October 12, 2028 - nightfall October 13, 2028
- Under Jewish Law, attending classes or taking examinations is classified as "work". Consequently, observant students and staff will be unable to participate in academic obligations or required meetings during these two days.
- Community members may need to leave campus early to reach home or their place of worship before the holiday begins at sunset.
- Because electronic use is restricted, observers will not be available to respond to emails or attend virtual sessions during this 48-hour period.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these concluding holiday dates on your calendar and syllabus. Note that many students may have just balanced the earlier obligations of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the start of Sukkot.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, using the traditional greeting "Chag Sameach!" (Happy Holiday!) is appreciated. Recognize that these days are just as significant as the earlier High Holy Days for observant community members.

Be Accommodating

Avoid scheduling major exams, project presentations, or mandatory recruitment events during this period. Work proactively with students to find alternative arrangements for any missed academic responsibilities.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.

- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed background on the meaning, liturgy, and customs of these holidays.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Shavuot

Chag Sameach! Happy Holiday!

In late spring or early summer, Jewish students, faculty, and staff observe Shavuot, a major festival with deep historical and agricultural roots. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Shavuot?

Shavuot, known as the Festival of Weeks, is one of the three major Jewish pilgrimage festivals. Agriculturally, it marks the early summer grain harvest and the time when the first fruits were brought to the Temple. Historically, it celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, signifying the spiritual redemption of the Jewish people following their physical exodus from Egypt. It is observed 50 days (seven full weeks) after the second day of Passover.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- It is a traditional custom to stay up the entire first night of the holiday studying the Torah, followed by prayer as early as possible in the morning.
- Synagogue services include special readings, including poems and the Book of Ruth.
- Traditionally observant Jews refrain from all "work," which includes creative activities like writing, typing, using electronic equipment (phones, computers), and traveling in cars.
- It is customary to eat dairy meals, such as cheesecake or blintzes. This tradition often symbolizes the promise of Israel as a land "flowing with milk and honey".

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:
    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset June 10, 2027 - nightfall June 12, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset May 30, 2028 - nightfall June 1, 2028

- Under Jewish law, attending classes or taking examinations is not itself prohibited work; rather, the activities they may require, such as writing, using electronics, or traveling can be prohibited on these holy days.
- Because electronic use is restricted, observers will not be available to respond to emails or participate in virtual meetings during the 48-hour period of the holiday.
- Students who participate in the tradition of staying up all night for study may have significantly reduced energy levels the following day.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar and syllabus. While Shavuot often falls near the end of the academic year or during summer terms. For traditional Jews, its observance may be considered as significant as the autumn High Holy Days, though this level of observance is less common among American Jews more broadly.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, using the traditional greeting "Chag Sameach!" (Happy Holiday!) is appreciated. Avoid scheduling final exams, major project deadlines, or mandatory orientations during these two days.

Be Accommodating

Recognize that a request for a deferral or alternative assignment date is a genuine wish to observe a holy day. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations for missed academic responsibilities.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Shavuot - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the significance, length, and customs of the Festival of Weeks.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Sabbath

Sabbath Shalom! Good Shabbos!

Every week, Jewish students, faculty, and staff observe Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Sabbath?

Sabbath is the most important ritual observance in Judaism and is the only ritual instituted in the Ten Commandments. It is a joyful day of rest and spiritual enrichment where observers set aside weekday concerns to devote themselves to higher pursuits. The day involves two interrelated commandments: to remember (zakhor) and to observe (shamor). It commemorates both the creation of the world, noting that God rested on the seventh day, and the exodus from Egypt, serving as a weekly reminder of freedom from slavery.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Sabbath begins every week just before sunset on Friday and terminates at nightfall on Saturday (approximately 25 hours later).
- The day officially begins when the woman of the household lights Sabbath candles and recites a blessing no later than 18 minutes before sunset.
- Jewish Law prohibits "melachah" (creative work) on Sabbath. This includes writing, typing, operating electronic equipment (such as computers, lights, and phones), engaging in commercial transactions, and traveling by car or other motorized vehicle. For traditionally observant Jews, riding or driving is generally prohibited because it can involve combustion, electricity, and other categories of prohibited work (melacha).
- Observance includes attending synagogue services and sharing festive meals. Meals begin with Kiddush (a prayer over wine) and a blessing over two loaves of challah (braided bread). A traditional slow-cooked stew called cholent is often served for lunch on Saturday.

- Sabbath ends at nightfall when three stars are visible, marked by a concluding ritual called Havdalah, which involves blessings over wine, spices, and a multi-wicked candle.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Because Sabbath begins at sunset, observant students and staff must reach home in time to prepare. In winter months, this often requires leaving campus quite early on Friday afternoons.
- Under Jewish Law, attending classes or taking examinations is classified as "work"and is prohibited.
- During the 25 hours of Sabbath, observant members of the community will not check email, attend virtual meetings, or use telephones.
- Unlike annual holidays, these restrictions occur every week, requiring ongoing awareness regarding Friday evening and Saturday scheduling.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Recognize that the start time for Sabbath changes throughout the semester as the sun sets earlier in the fall. Include a note in your syllabus inviting students to discuss recurring Friday afternoon or Saturday conflicts.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, using the traditional greetings "Shabbat Shalom" (Sabbath peace) or "Good Shabbos" is appreciated. Avoid scheduling mandatory exams, field trips, or department social events on Friday evenings or Saturdays.

Be Accommodating

Requests for time off for Sabbath should be regarded as a genuine and conscientious wish to observe the holy day. Since there is no provision in Jewish Law for a rabbi to grant a "dispensation" from these restrictions, work with students to find alternative arrangements for missed Saturday requirements.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Sabbath - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the nature, laws, and traditional recipes of the Sabbath.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Rosh Hashanah

Shana Tova! L'shanah tovah!

During the fall semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Rosh Hashanah?

Rosh Hashanah, which literally means "head of the year," is one of the holiest days of the Jewish year. It marks the beginning of a ten-day period of introspection and repentance known as the High Holidays or Days of Awe, which concludes with Yom Kippur. The holiday celebrates the anniversary of the creation of the world and serves as a time for individuals to look back at the mistakes of the past year and plan for positive changes in the new one.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Much of the holiday is spent in the synagogue, where the liturgy is expanded with a special prayerbook called a machzor.
- A central observance is hearing the sounding of the shofar (a ram's horn trumpet), which serves as a symbolic call to repentance.
- Families gather for festive meals featuring symbolic foods, most notably apples and bread dipped in honey to represent the wish for a "sweet new year".
- A custom known as "casting off," where individuals walk to a flowing body of water to symbolically empty their pockets (often using bread crumbs) to represent casting away sins.
- Traditionally observant Jews refrain from activities classified as prohibited work (melacha), which can include writing, typing, using electronic equipment such as phones and computers, and traveling by car.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:
    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset September 11, 2026 - nightfall September 13, 2026
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset October 1, 2027 - nightfall October 3, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5789: sunset September 20, 2028 - nightfall September 22, 2028
- Under Jewish Law, attending classes or taking examinations is classified as "work". Consequently, observant students and staff will be unable to participate in academic obligations or required meetings during these two days.
- Because electronic use is restricted, observers will not be available to respond to emails or attend virtual sessions during the holiday.
- Many community members will need to leave campus early on the eve of the holiday to reach home in good time to prepare or travel to their home communities.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar and syllabus. Recognize that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the most widely observed Jewish holidays.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, offering the traditional holiday greetings "Shana Tova" or “L’shanah tovah” (For a good year) is appreciated. Avoid scheduling exams, major project deadlines, or mandatory networking and recruitment events during this two-day period.

Be Accommodating

Understand that there is no provision in Jewish Law for a "dispensation" from work restrictions. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find alternative arrangements for academic responsibilities.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.

- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Rosh Hashanah - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the significance, traditions, and dates of the New Year.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Purim

Happy Purim!

During the spring semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Purim, one of the most joyous and festive holidays on the Jewish calendar. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Purim?

Purim (meaning "lots") commemorates the time when the Jewish people living in ancient Persia were saved from a plot to exterminate them. The story is told in the Biblical Book of Esther, featuring the heroes Esther and Mordecai, who outmaneuvered the king's advisor, Haman. It is a celebration of survival against oppression and a reminder of how seemingly chance events can reflect divine providence.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The primary commandment is to hear the public reading of the Book of Esther (the Megillah). It is customary for the congregants or participants to boo, hiss, and use noisemakers called gragers to "blot out" the name of the villain Haman whenever it is read.
- Observers are commanded to send gifts of food and drink (shalach manos) to friends and to give to the poor.
- The day is celebrated with "feasting and gladness," which often includes drinking and large communal meals.
- It is traditional to hold costume parties, perform parodies known as Purim Shpils, and eat triangular fruit-filled cookies called hamentaschen (meant to represent Haman's three-cornered hat).
- Purim is preceded by a minor fast, the Fast of Esther, which commemorates Esther's three days of fasting before she approached the king.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:
    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset March 22, 2027 - nightfall March 23, 2027
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset March 11, 2028 - nightfall March 12, 2028
- Unlike the High Holy Days or the Sabbath, Purim is not subject to strict sabbath-like work restrictions. Students and staff may attend classes, write, and use electronics.
- The preceding Fast of Esther may result in reduced energy levels for those observing the fast before the evening's festivities begin.
- Because the holiday requires active participation in community readings, gift-giving, and festive meals, students and staff may be heavily involved in campus celebrations during the evening and day of the holiday.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

While work is permitted, recognize that Purim is a time of significant religious and communal obligation. Avoid scheduling major high-stakes events on the night of the Megillah reading.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, offering a holiday greeting such as "Happy Purim!" is appreciated.

Be Accommodating

Though students may attend class, some may request minor flexibility to attend a morning Megillah reading or deliver food gifts as required by the holiday's commandments.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Purim - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed background on the history, laws, and traditional recipes for the holiday.

- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Passover

Chag Sameach! Happy Passover!

During the winter semester, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Passover, a holiday observed by most Jews world-wide. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. When is Passover?

In 2026, Passover falls from the evening of April 21 to sunset on April 29. It is an eight-day holiday, beginning on the 15th of the Jewish month of Nisan. Because the Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, Passover falls on different days of the Gregorian calendar each year, always in March or April.

2. How are these holidays observed?

- On the first two evenings (Wednesday April 21-Thursday April 22) many Jews hold a Passover Seder–a special meal with symbolic foods, and people use both ancient and contemporary texts to discuss the themes of liberation and redemption, rooted in the biblical story of the Exodus from enslavement in Egypt and connected to contemporary struggles for freedom.
- Many Jews observe Passover by not eating leavened products or grains for the entire holiday, and instead eat matzah, an unleavened bread, and products prepared according to the holiday's dietary restrictions. Many Jews who do not follow kosher dietary laws during the year observe additional dietary restrictions during Passover; for example, pork and shellfish are not eaten.
- The first two days (Thursday 4/22-Saturday 4/24) and the last two days (Wednesday 4/28-Thursday 4/29) are considered holy days, during which traditionally observant Jews refrain from all kinds of work, similar to their observance of the sabbath each week (including using anything electronic, riding in cars, writing or typing).

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

This year, Passover falls during finals week and extends into the graduation period, which may affect students' academic and commencement-related activities. Because Seders are usually conducted at home, many students, faculty, and staff will want to be home or travel to be with their families to celebrate. The scheduling of faculty meetings and retreats, commonly held near the end of the semester, should offer Passover-friendly food options.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar. Let students know that you are aware that some may be observing these holidays and invite them to approach you about accommodations. Encourage Jewish faculty and staff to be proactive about making alternate schedule arrangements for this week.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, offering a holiday greeting such as "Happy Holiday!" or "Happy Passover!" is appreciated. Recognize that requests from differently observant students may vary. Consider your final presentation or assignment schedule so that Jewish students can both complete their course requirements and celebrate their holiday.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or to fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work with students to find accommodations if conflicts arise..

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Chanukah

Happy Chanukah!

During the late fall or early winter, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe Chanukah, the eight-day "Festival of Lights." Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Chanukah?

Chanukah, which means "dedication," commemorates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem after a successful revolt against the Seleucid Greek empire over 2,000 years ago. While it is one of the most widely known Jewish holidays due to its proximity to Christmas, it is considered a minor religious holiday compared to observances like Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. The holiday celebrates the miracle of the oil, where a single day's supply of purified oil miraculously burned for eight days in the Temple's menorah.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The primary ritual is the lighting of a nine-branched candelabrum called a menorah (or chanukiah). One candle is lit on the first night, with an additional candle added each subsequent evening until all eight are lit on the final night.
- It is customary to eat foods fried in oil to remember the miracle, most notably latkes (potato pancakes) and doughnuts.
- Many families play a game with a four-sided spinning top called a dreidel, which features Hebrew letters representing the phrase "A great miracle happened there".
- While not a traditional religious requirement, many families exchange small gifts or "gelt" (money/chocolate coins), a custom that has evolved significantly in modern times.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Timings:
    - Jewish Year 5787: sunset December 4, 2026 - nightfall December 12, 2026
        - (first candle: night of 12/4; last candle: night of 12/11)
    - Jewish Year 5788: sunset December 24, 2027 - nightfall January 1, 2028
        - (first candle: night of 12/24; last candle: night of 12/31)
    - Jewish Year 5789: sunset December 12, 2028 - nightfall December 20, 2028
        - (first candle: night of 12/12; last candle: night of 12/19)
- Unlike the major High Holy Days, there are no religious prohibitions against "work" on Chanukah. Observant students and staff are permitted to attend classes, take exams, and use electronic equipment.
- Because the menorah is traditionally lit after dark, students and staff may wish to be home or at a communal celebration in the early evening.
- Since Chanukah often coincides with the conclusion of the fall term, community members may be balancing final exams and projects with holiday gatherings and candle-lighting ceremonies.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these eight days on your calendar. Even though academic accommodations for work restrictions are not required, acknowledging the holiday helps foster an inclusive environment.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, offering the greeting “Happy Chanukah!” is appreciated. Recognize that for many Jewish community members, this is a time for joyful social gatherings and public celebrations.

Be Accommodating

Be mindful when scheduling optional evening social events or late-night meetings during these eight days, as many students will want to participate in nightly candle-lighting rituals.

5. Resources

- **Hillel at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chabad at U-M:** A campus resource for information and holiday celebrations at U-M.
- **Chanukah - Judaism 101 (JewFAQ):** Provides detailed information on the history, traditions, and music of the festival.
- **Calendar of Jewish Festivals and Fasts 2023-2028:** A reference for holiday dates and work restriction guidelines.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Shana Tova

Happy New Year!

During the academic year, Jewish students, faculty, and staff will observe a series of holidays that mark the new year of the Jewish calendar. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What are the fall Jewish holidays?

The High Holidays begin with Rosh Hashanah, which this year begins on Friday evening, September 11, and ends at sundown on Sunday, September 13. The Jewish New Year - a celebratory time with religious services and holiday meals. Yom Kippur (10/1 to 10/2) – the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar - is a day of atonement, prayer, and reflection, during which many Jews fast and attend religious services. These are the most widely observed Jewish holidays. They are followed by Sukkot (Friday, 9/25 through Thursday 10/1) – a week-long holiday centered around a Sukkah - a temporary dwelling in which people eat meals that include apples dipped in honey, round challah bread, pomegranates, carrots, fish heads, and various seasonal gourds and beans. The first two days of Sukkot (Friday 10/2 through Sunday 10/4) and the concluding holidays of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah (10/13 - 10/15) are considered holy days, during which observant Jews abstain from work and attend religious services.

2. How are these holidays observed?

All of these holidays begin at sundown on the first date listed and run through to sundown on the last day listed. Many Jews prepare and partake in festive meals with family and friends and attend religious services. For Yom Kippur, Jews of different observance levels will fast from sundown to sundown. Traditionally observant Jews refrain from all kinds of work (including using anything electronic, riding in cars, writing or typing) on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first two days of Sukkot, Simchat Torah, and Shemini Atzeret.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

Thousands of our community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this period. Asking for an accommodation may be one of the first interactions a student has with their professor. Before the holiday begins, many will need time to prepare; some students may return to their home communities to be with family. Common concerns include conflicts with: exam/class schedules, required meetings, social gatherings, and professional and academic opportunities (such as networking and recruitment events).

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar. Let students know in your syllabus and at the beginning of the semester that you are aware that some may be observing these holidays and invite them to approach you about accommodations.

Be Inclusive

While not obligatory for non-Jewish people, offering holiday greetings such as “Shana Tova” or “Happy New Year” is appreciated. Recognize that requests from differently observant students may vary. Avoid scheduling exams, meetings, or assignments during these times.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or to fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work with students to find accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- Hillel and Chabad are campus resources for those who are seeking information or ways to celebrate the holidays.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Sikh Fact Sheets

Vaisakhi

Vaisakhi Diyan Lakh Lakh Vadhaiyan! / Happy Vaisakhi!

During the spring semester (mid-April), Sikh students, faculty, and staff observe Vaisakhi, the premier religious milestone in the Sikh tradition marking the birth of the Khalsa. Mid-April also coincides with regional spring harvest festivals and Solar New Years across South and Southeast Asia. Here is how you can support Sikh community members and promote a more inclusive campus environment.

1. What is Vaisakhi?

Vaisakhi is one of the most sacred dates in the Sikh calendar. It commemorates 1699, when the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, established the Khalsa (the collective body of initiated Sikhs). During a historic gathering in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, the Guru called for individuals willing to give their lives for righteousness. The five who stepped forward became the Panj Pyaarey (the Five Beloved Ones). This event formalized core Sikh values: radical equality, social justice, devotion, standing against oppression, and wearing the five articles of faith (Kakkars).

- Vaisakhi falls annually on April 13 or 14. Because mid-April aligns with the solar spring harvest in South Asia, regional Hindu and Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions also celebrate regional Solar New Years around this same time (such as Pohela Boishakh in Bengal, Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, Vishu in Kerala, Songkran in Thailand, and Aluth Avurudda in Sri Lanka). However, for Sikhs, Vaisakhi's core identity is distinctly religious and historical.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Sikhs gather at the Gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) for Gurbani Kirtan (devotional singing) and spiritual discourses. Many Gurdwaras conduct an Akhand Path, a continuous, 48-hour reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the holy scripture).

- A cornerstone of Vaisakhi is Langar, a free, vegetarian community meal prepared and served by volunteers. Everyone sits together on the floor as equals, regardless of background, caste, or status.
- Communities organize vibrant street processions (Nagar Kirtan) led by the Panj Pyaarey and the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, featuring hymn singing, martial arts displays (Gatkaa), and free food distribution to the public.
- While individual prayers occur on April 13 or 14, local Gurdwaras and university student groups frequently host their primary congregational celebrations, Langar events, and Nagar Kirtans on the closest weekend.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Occurring in mid-April, Vaisakhi frequently falls near the end of the U-M winter semester, coinciding with final exam preparation, final projects, or end-of-year presentations.
- Students, faculty, and staff may participate in local Gurdwara services, volunteer for Langar preparation, or assist in organizing campus-wide cultural and educational events.
- Recognizing Vaisakhi offers vital support for Sikh students, who are often visibly identifiable by their turbans (dastaar) and articles of faith, fostering a sense of belonging within the broader university community.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark April 13 and 14 on your syllabus and calendar. Mentioning the date acknowledges students who may be balancing religious obligations during a high-stress academic window.

Be Inclusive

Use traditional Punjabi/Sikh greetings: "Vaisakhi Diyan Lakh Lakh Vadhaiyan!" (Thousands of congratulations on Vaisakhi!) or "Happy Vaisakhi!"

Be Accommodating

Offer reasonable flexibility for assignment submissions or exam scheduling if students are attending services or volunteering for community Langar initiatives.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Sikh, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Sikh student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF):** Provides educational resources on the regional significance and traditions of Vaisakhi.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Buddhism Fact Sheets

Vesak Day

Have a peaceful and joyous Vesak!

During the spring semester, Buddhist students, faculty, and staff may observe Vesak Day, which is widely regarded as the closest to a "universal" Buddhist holiday in the modern world (particularly within Theravada reckoning). Here is how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Vesak Day?

Vesak Day (also known as Wesak, Visākha Pūjā, or Buddha Purnima) commemorates three pivotal events in the life of the Buddha: his birth, enlightenment, and passing (parinirvana). It serves as a sacred time to reflect on his teachings (the Dharma). While widely observed across Theravada and many Mahayana traditions, holiday practices vary globally:

- South & Southeast Asian Theravada: Vesak is central, though the mid-April Solar New Year is often the primary annual day for temple attendance.
- East Asian, Tibetan, & Mongolian: Major observances follow their respective regional calendars.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Observants visit local temples to chant, meditate, and leave offerings of flowers, candles, and incense.
- A central focus is active giving, such as providing food/supplies to temples and distributing meals to those in need.
- Followers reaffirm moral precepts, often adopting a vegetarian diet. Pious Theravada Buddhists may observe the Eight Precepts, wearing simple white clothing and refraining from solid food after noon.
- Practitioners bathe a statue of the infant Buddha to symbolize mental purification, and decorate homes and temples with lanterns.

- In diaspora communities, temples often host major congregational events on the closest weekend, though individual prayers occur on the exact full moon date.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Vesak follows a lunar calendar and falls on a full moon, typically in April, May, or early June. Exact dates vary globally depending on the specific tradition or country of origin.
- While the number of students observing strictly on the exact calendar date may be small, increasing awareness of Vesak helps students from Buddhist families feel recognized and included within the broader U-M community.
- On years when Vesak falls on a weekday, students or employees may seek time off or alternative arrangements for morning temple visits or extended evening meditation services.
- Students observing the holiday may look for strict vegetarian meal options or require flexibility if observing the noon-to-dawn fast under the Eight Precepts.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the full moon window on your syllabus. Welcoming students to share their specific tradition’s plans for holiday observance helps build trust.

Be Inclusive

Use traditional greetings such as "Happy Vesak Day" or "Have a peaceful and joyous Vesak." Avoid scheduling major mandatory high-stakes events on the full moon date when possible.

Be Accommodating

Recognize that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments, exams, or class participation if attending religious services or participating in fasts. Faculty and staff should work proactively to provide reasonable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Buddhist, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Buddhist student organizations at U-M.

- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community.
- **Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding:** Provides detailed information on religious diversity and holiday fact sheets.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Guru Purnima

Happy Guru Purnima!

During the summer months, students, faculty, and staff from Hindu, Jain, and broader South Asian traditions observe Guru Purnima, a sacred day dedicated to honoring spiritual and academic teachers, mentors, and scholars. Here is how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Guru Purnima?

In Sanskrit, Guru literally means "the one who dispels darkness and ignorance" (gu\= darkness, ru \= remover). Guru Purnima is a traditional holy day celebrated by disciples and students to pay respect and express gratitude to their chosen teachers, mentors, and spiritual preceptors. The holiday emphasizes the attainment of wisdom and character over purely material knowledge. In traditional lineage practices, it recognizes that guidance begins with one's parents, extends to academic teachers who impart intellectual knowledge, and culminates in the spiritual master who guides one's inner growth.

- Note on Buddhist Context (Āsāḷha Pūjā): "Guru Purnima" as such is not a holiday in Theravada Buddhist cultures. However, the same full moon of Āsāḷha (June/July) is observed in many Theravada traditions as Āsāḷha Pūjā (or Asanha Bucha), which marks the Buddha's first sermon and the eve of the annual Vassa (rains retreat). While Āsāḷha Pūjā is a meaningful monastic and community day, it is generally secondary in observance compared to Vesak or the Solar New Year.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Students and disciples visit their teachers, mentors, or spiritual masters to pay homage, offer traditional bows (pranāma), and receive blessings.
- It is common to present modest symbolic offerings to honor gurus, such as fruits, flowers, sweets, simple garments, or traditional monetary gifts.

- Aspirants participate in devotional singing (bhajan), scriptural study, and meditation, rededicating themselves to practicing the values and teachings imparted by their masters.
- Many communities hold public discourses emphasizing the dignity, selflessness, and societal responsibility of educators and mentors in shaping future generations.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Guru Purnima occurs on the full moon (purnima) of the lunar month of Āsāḷha in the Hindu calendar, which typically falls in late June or July.
- Because the holiday falls during the summer term, many students, researchers, and employees balance summer coursework, research lab schedules, or clinical rotations with their observances.
- Practitioners often observe a lacto-vegetarian diet or fast on this full moon day.
- Given that the day centers on the mentor-student relationship, faculty members and academic advisors may receive messages of appreciation or requests for brief visits from South Asian students and colleagues.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the full moon in June/July on your calendar. Even during quieter summer sessions, its personal significance for students and staff remains high.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: "Happy Guru Purnima!" Acknowledge the deep cultural value placed on mentorship and the teacher-student relationship.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students or staff may seek flexibility to attend morning or evening temple services, visit mentors, or participate in fasts.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Buddhist, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations at U-M.

- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **Sri Sathya Sai International Organization:** Provides detailed information on the spiritual significance and universal celebration of Guru Poornima.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Bahá'í Fact Sheets

Twelfth Day of Ridván

Happy Riḍván!

During the spring semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff observe the Twelfth Day of Riḍván, the conclusion of the "Most Great Festival" of the Bahá'í Faith. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Twelfth Day of Riḍván?

Riḍván (meaning "paradise") is a twelve-day festival commemorating the period in 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, stayed in a garden on the banks of the Tigris River in Baghdad. The Twelfth Day marks the conclusion of this stay and commemorates Bahá'u'lláh's departure into further exile toward Constantinople. While his departure was a time of sadness for those he left behind, Bahá'ís today celebrate this day as a symbol of the growth of his teachings and a vision of unity and progress for all people.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The Twelfth Day of Riḍván is one of the nine Bahá'í Holy Days on which work and school are suspended.
- Bahá'ís often gather to read aloud or privately reflect on selections from Bahá'í scriptures, known as Tablets, specifically those related to the significance of the Riḍván period.
- As part of the "King of Festivals," the day is a joyous occasion for community gathering and renewal.
- There are no specific dietary restrictions for the holiday, though Bahá'ís abstain from alcohol.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Bahá'í days begin and end at sunset. Consequently, the holiday is observed starting from the sunset of the day before the Gregorian date listed.

- Thousands of community members may endeavor to balance academic and religious obligations. Observant Bahá'ís typically suspend work and school on this day, which may lead to absences from classes, exams, or meetings.
- Common concerns include conflicts with exam/class schedules and professional opportunities, such as networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark this date on your calendar. Be mindful that the date of Riḍván varies slightly each year. For 2027, the Twelfth Day of Riḍván is observed from sunset on May 1 to sunset on May 2.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: "Happy Riḍván!" Recognize that for Bahá'í students, this is a time of major religious significance that requires a pause from routine activities.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities due to the suspension of work. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **The Festival of Riḍván – Baha'is of the United States:** Provides detailed background on the history and significance of the festival.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Ninth Day of Ridván

Happy Riḍván!

During the spring semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff will observe the Ninth Day of Riḍván, a holy day with special significance within the "Most Great Festival" of the Bahá'í Faith. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Ninth Day of Riḍván?

The Ninth Day of Riḍván is a cornerstone of the twelve-day Riḍván festival, which commemorates the time Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, spent in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad in 1863. On the ninth day of his stay, the flooded Tigris River receded enough for his family to cross by boat and join him in the garden. This reunion is celebrated as a powerful symbol of unity and love, and it serves as a day to proclaim the fundamental Bahá'í principle of the unity of the human family.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- It is one of the nine holy days in the Bahá'í calendar on which work and school are suspended.
- Bahá'í communities worldwide host parties and gatherings characterized by "supreme felicity," welcoming everyone in the spirit of fellowship.
- Observants often gather to read aloud or privately reflect on the Tablets (Bahá'í scriptures) to mark the occasion and reflect on its spiritual significance.
- In accordance with Bahá'í practice, observants abstain from alcohol during these festivities.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Bahá'í days run from sunset to sunset. For 2027, the Ninth Day of Riḍván is observed from sunset on Wednesday, April 28, through nightfall on Thursday, April 29.

- Because work and school are suspended, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during the 24-hour period of the holiday.
- Common concerns for community members include conflicts with exam or class schedules, required meetings, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.
- Many individuals may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday to prepare for the observance or travel to join their communities.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar and include them in your syllabus to signal your awareness of students' potential observances.

Be Inclusive

Use the traditional greeting: "Happy Riḍván!". Recognize that this is considered a "Most Great Festival" and a time of intense joy for the community.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams due to the religious requirement to suspend work. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **BahaiTeachings.org – Ninth Day of Riḍván:** Offers insights into the spiritual significance of the holiday and the unity of the human family.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Martyrdom of the Báb

During the summer semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff will observe the Martyrdom of the Báb, a solemn holy day commemorating the sacrifice of one of the faith's co-founders. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Martyrdom of the Báb?

The Martyrdom of the Báb commemorates the 1850 execution of the Báb, the "herald" and co-founder of the Bahá'í Faith. In 1844, the Báb arose to proclaim the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and faced bitter persecution from the Persian nation. He is described as the "early light of the true morn" who gave his life in the Cause of God. This day is a significant moment of reflection for Bahá'ís, as the Báb was a "Divine Educator" sent to provide spiritual guidance for the modern era.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- It is one of the nine Bahá'í Holy Days on which work and school are suspended.
- The holiday is often specifically commemorated at noon, the approximate time the Báb was executed.
- Bahá'ís observe the day with prayers and the reading of specific Bahá'í scriptures known as the Tablets of Visitation.
- The community reflects on the Báb's sacrifice and his example of being "self-sacrificing and aglow with the fire of the love of God".
- Unlike more celebratory festivals, this is a day of mourning and remembrance, described in Bahá'í writings as a time when the "Sun of Truth concealed itself behind the clouds of mercy".

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- For 2027, the Martyrdom of the Báb is observed from sunset on July 9 through sunset on July 10.

- Because Bahá'í holy days require the suspension of work and school, observant students and staff will not attend classes, examinations, or required meetings during the 24-hour period.
- Observers will not be available to respond to emails or participate in virtual sessions, as they are focused on religious obligations.
- Many community members may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday to prepare for the observance or travel to join their local community.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark July 10 on your calendar and note it in your syllabus. Recognize that while there is no traditional greeting for this solemn occasion, acknowledging its significance for Bahá'í members promotes an inclusive environment.

Be Inclusive

Avoid scheduling exams, major assignments, or mandatory networking and recruitment events during this period. Recognize that for observant Bahá'ís, taking the day off is a religious mandate.

Be Accommodating

Faculty and staff should work with students to find alternative arrangements for turning in assignments or fulfilling class responsibilities that conflict with the holiday.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **Bahá'í of the United States – Martyrdom of the Báb:** Provides history and scriptures related to the Martyrdom of the Báb.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

First Day of Ridván

Happy Riḍván!

During the spring semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff will observe the First Day of Riḍván, which is considered the holiest and most joyous day of the Bahá'í year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the First Day of Riḍván?

Riḍván, which means "paradise", is a twelve-day festival often referred to in Bahá'í teachings as the "King of Festivals". It commemorates the anniversary of the declaration of the Bahá'í Faith in April 1863, when Bahá'u'lláh first declared his mission as a Manifestation of God while sojourning in a garden on the banks of the Tigris River in Baghdad. The First Day specifically marks the moment this new religion was inaugurated, transforming a time of exile and crisis into a joyous celebration of revelation and renewal.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The First Day of Riḍván is one of nine holy days in the Bahá'í calendar during which work and school are suspended.
- On this day, Bahá'í communities across the globe participate in the annual elections of their local governing councils, known as Local Spiritual Assemblies.
- Observance includes community gatherings characterized by songs, prayers, and the reading of Bahá'í scriptures.
- Every year on the first day of the festival, the Universal House of Justice (the international governing body of the faith) delivers a special message to the worldwide Bahá'í community.
- In accordance with Bahá'í law, practitioners abstain from alcohol during their festivities.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- For 2027, the First Day of Riḍván is observed on April 21, 2027. Because Bahá'í days run from sunset to sunset, the holiday is marked from sunset on April 20 through nightfall on April 21.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance academic and religious obligations. Because the suspension of work is a religious mandate, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during this 24-hour period.
- Potential concerns for community members include conflicts with exam and class schedules, project deadlines, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.
- Many individuals may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday (April 20) to reach their homes or travel to join their local communities.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal awareness of the holiday.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: "Happy Riḍván!" Avoid scheduling major exams, mandatory meetings, or high-stakes assignments during the 24-hour period of observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.

- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **Bahá'í Center of Washtenaw County:** Local resource for the university community in Ann Arbor.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Declaration of the Báb

During the spring semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff observe the Declaration of the Báb, a major holy day marking the inception of their faith. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Declaration of the Báb?

The Declaration of the Báb commemorates May 23, 1844, when the Báb announced in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), that he was a Messenger of God. He served as a "Divine Educator" who provided spiritual guidance for the modern era and foretold the coming of another Messenger of God, Bahá'u'lláh, in the near future. This pivotal event officially inaugurated the Bahá'í Era (B.E.).

2. How is this holiday observed?

- It is one of the nine Bahá'í Holy Days during which work and school are suspended.
- The community observes the day with prayers and public readings from Bahá'í scriptures.
- Historically, the holiday has been celebrated as an "eternal feast" connecting the soul and body, sometimes involving representatives of many different religions gathered in While there are no specific food restrictions, Bahá'ís abstain from alcohol in accordance with their religious laws.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Bahá'í days run from sunset to sunset. For 2027, the Declaration of the Báb is observed from sunset on Sunday, May 23, through sunset on Monday, May 24.
- Because work and school are suspended, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during the 24-hour period.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with final exams, project deadlines, or professional opportunities such as networking and recruitment events.

- Some community members may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday to prepare for the observance.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and mention it in your syllabus to signal your awareness of students' religious observances.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that for Bahá'í members, this day marks the beginning of their religious history and is a time of significant spiritual reflection.

Be Accommodating

Understand that the suspension of work is a religious mandate. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find alternative arrangements for turning in assignments or fulfilling class responsibilities.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **Bahá'í of the United States – Declaration of the Báb:** Provides history and scriptures related to the Declaration of the Báb.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Birth of Bahá’u’lláh

Happy Twin Holy Days!

During the fall semester, Bahá’í students, faculty, and staff will observe the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, one of the most significant and joyous holidays in the Bahá’í calendar. Here’s how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh?

Bahá’u’lláh, born Mirza Husayn Aliy-i-Nuri on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Persia, is the prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith. His name means the “Glory of God,” and his teachings centered on justice, unity, and peace serve as the foundation of the faith. This holiday is celebrated as part of the “Twin Birthdays” or “Twin Manifestations,” alongside the birth of the Báb, because in the original lunar calendar, these two anniversaries fell on consecutive days. Bahá’ís recognize Bahá’u’lláh as a “Divine Educator” sent to provide spiritual guidance for the modern era.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- This is one of nine Bahá’í Holy Days on which work and school are suspended.
- Bahá’ís typically honor the occasion with joyous gatherings that include prayers, music, and devotional readings.
- The day is a time to celebrate the extraordinary power, wisdom, and unbounded generosity attributed to Bahá’u’lláh from his earliest childhood.
- In accordance with Bahá’í religious laws, practitioners abstain from alcohol during their festivities.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- For 2027, the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh is observed on Sunday, October 31. Because Bahá’í days run from sunset to sunset, the holiday is marked from sunset on October 30 through sunset on October 31.

- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance academic and religious obligations during this period. Because the suspension of work is a religious mandate, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during the 24-hour period of the holiday.
- Some students may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday to travel to join their home communities for celebrations.
- Potential concerns for community members include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to let students know you are aware of their potential observance.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greetings: “Happy Birth of Bahá’u’lláh” or “Happy Twin Holy Days!”. Recognize that for Bahá’í members, this is a time of profound spiritual significance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements for assignments or class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá’í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá’í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá’í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **Bahá’í of the United States – Birth of Bahá’u’lláh:** Provides history and scriptures related to the Declaration of the Báb.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Birth of Báb

Happy Birth of the Báb! or Happy Twin Birthdays!

During the fall semester, Bahá'í students, faculty, and staff will observe the Birth of the Báb, a joyous holy day commemorating one of the twin founders of their faith. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Birth of the Báb?

The Birth of the Báb commemorates the anniversary of the birth of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad on October 20, 1819, in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran). He later took the title of "the Báb," meaning "the Gate," signifying his role as the forerunner who opened the way for Bahá'u'lláh. He is a prominent figure as the founder of the Babi Faith and a prophet in his own right, heralding a new era of human unity and peace. This is the first of two successive "Twin Holy Days" celebrated by the global Bahá'í community.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The Birth of the Báb is one of nine holy days in the year when work and school are suspended.
- Communities celebrate with high spirits, including singing, dancing, and warm fellowship.
- Bahá'ís gather to pray and read aloud from Bahá'í writings and scriptures.
- While there are no specific dietary restrictions, many practitioners follow a vegetarian diet consisting of grains, fruits, and vegetables.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- For 2027, the Birth of the Báb is observed on Sunday, October 30. Because Bahá'í days run from sunset to sunset, the holiday is marked from sunset on Saturday, October 29, through sunset on October 30.

- Because the suspension of work is a religious mandate, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during this 24-hour period.
- Potential concerns for community members include conflicts with exam/class schedules, project deadlines, and professional opportunities like networking or recruitment events.
- Many individuals may need time before sunset on the eve of the holiday to travel or prepare for community celebrations.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and syllabus to signal your awareness of students' religious observances.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greetings: “Happy Birth of the Báb” or “Happy Twin Birthdays!”. Recognize that this is one of the happiest times of the year for the Bahá’í community.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams due to the religious requirement to suspend work. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá’í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá’í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá’í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.
- **BahaiTeachings.org – Birth of the Báb:** Offers insights into the spiritual significance of the holiday and the unity of the human family.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh

During the spring/summer semester, Bahá’í students, faculty, and staff will observe the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, a solemn holy day commemorating the passing of the founder of their faith. Here’s how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh?

This holiday commemorates the anniversary of the death of Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), the founder of the Bahá’í Faith and a "Divine Educator" sent by God to provide spiritual guidance for the modern era. His passing, which occurred on May 29, 1892, in northern Israel, is described in Bahá’í writings as the setting of the "Sun of Baha". Bahá’ís believe that his "ascension" allowed his glory to shine "everlastingly from the Abha Horizon," continuing to guide humanity toward the goal of unification.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh is one of the nine holy days in the Bahá’í calendar during which work and school are suspended.
- The day is traditionally marked with devotional programs and prayers held approximately eight hours after sunset (around 3:00 AM), reflecting the approximate time of his passing.
- Observants gather to read from Bahá’í scriptures, including the Tablets of Visitation or selections from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reflecting on his life and teachings.
- The community focuses on the belief that the "streaming splendors" and influence of a holy Manifestation intensify after their ascension from the world.
- In accordance with Bahá’í religious law, practitioners abstain from alcohol.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- For 2027, the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh is observed on May 29, 2026. Bahá'í days run from sunset to sunset, meaning the holiday is marked from sunset on May 28 through sunset on May 29.
- Because the suspension of work is a religious mandate, observant students and staff will not attend classes, take examinations, or participate in required meetings during the 24-hour period of the holiday.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, and professional or academic opportunities.
- Because central rituals occur in the very early morning, students may have adjusted sleep patterns or different energy levels on the day of the holiday.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus. Recognize that while the date varies annually, its significance for the Bahá'í community remains high.

Be Inclusive

Recognize that there is no traditional greeting for this solemn occasion. Avoid scheduling mandatory meetings, high-stakes assignments, or networking events during the 24-hour period of observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities due to religious requirements. Faculty and staff should work proactively to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í, U-M:** A directory for connecting with Bahá'í student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious diversity.
- **The Bahá'í Calendar:** Provides information on the Badí' calendar and the timing of Holy Days.

- **Bahá'í of the United States – Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh:** Provides history and scriptures related to the Declaration of the Báb.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Interfaith Fact Sheets

Nowruz

Happy Nowruz! or Happy New Year!

During the spring semester, students, faculty, and staff from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds observe Nowruz, a festive celebration marking the beginning of a new year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Nowruz?

Nowruz translates to "new day" and is a festive celebration of the spring equinox. Originating in Persia and the Zoroastrian faith, the holiday is a central part of Iranian cultural identity and was recognized by the United Nations as an international holiday in 2010. While celebrated as a secular holiday by many, it is also recognized as a holy day for Bahá'ís and Zoroastrians.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Common practices include feasts, prayer, dancing, performances, and painting eggs. Families often gather for picnics and assemble a symbolic haft-sin (or haft seen) table.
- On the eve of Nowruz, the festival of Chahar-shanbe-soori involves jumping over bonfire flames to symbolically cleanse negative energy from the past year and welcome blessings for the new.
- For Bahá'ís, the holiday, often spelled Naw-Rúz and it is a feast day marking the conclusion of a 19-day religious fast.
- Dietary practices vary by individual and culture; some follow halal guidelines or a vegetarian diet, while Bahá'ís abstain from alcohol.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- The holiday coincides with the start of the spring equinox, typically falling between March 19 and 21.

- Bahá'ís and Zoroastrians traditionally suspend work, and Muslim colleagues or students may request to take the first day of the celebration off.
- Community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this festive period. Requesting an accommodation for Nowruz may be one of the first interactions a student has with their professor.
- Potential concerns for students include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the dates of the spring equinox on your calendar. Mention the holiday in your syllabus to signal your awareness of potential observances and invite students to discuss accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greetings: "Happy Nowruz" or "Happy New Year." Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific religious or cultural traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or examinations. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Bahá'í and Muslim, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **United Nations – International Nowruz Day:** Provides information on the global and historical significance of the holiday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year Gong hei fat choy! / Gōng xǐ fā cái! / Sae hae bok manhi bah doo seh yo!

During the winter semester, students, faculty, and staff of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese descent, along with many other Asian American and Pacific Islander community members, will celebrate Lunar New Year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Lunar New Year?

Lunar New Year marks the arrival of spring and the beginning of a new year based on the traditional lunisolar calendar. It is the most important holiday in China (where it is called the Spring Festival or *Chun Jie*), and is also widely observed in Korea (Seollal) and Vietnam (Tết). The holiday is associated with the Chinese zodiac; for example, 2026 is the Year of the Horse, which officially began on February 17, 2026.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The highlight of the holiday is the reunion dinner on Lunar New Year's Eve, a feast where immediate and extended family gather.
- Families decorate their homes with red paper cuttings and couplets to express auspicious wishes. Other customs include cleaning the house, settling debts and disputes, and honoring elders and ancestors.
- It is traditional to exchange red envelopes containing money. Festivities often feature traditional dances, such as lion dances, and public festivals.
- Celebrations include symbolic dishes like whole fish (representing abundance) and tangyuan (sweet rice balls representing family unity).
- The 15-day celebration concludes with the Lantern Festival, where children carry lanterns around their neighborhoods at night.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- The holiday typically falls between January 21 and February 19. In 2026, the main celebration occurred around February 17.
- Thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and cultural obligations during this period. Because it is a major time for travel, some students may return to their home communities to be with family.
- Common concerns for students and staff include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional recruitment events.
- While not a federal holiday, some states (like California and New Jersey) and cities with large Asian American populations have declared it an official holiday or recognize it as a public-school holiday.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar and syllabus. Recognize that Lunar New Year is a significant cultural event that may involve multi-day travel for students visiting family.

Be Inclusive

Offer traditional greetings like “Happy New Year,” “Gong hei fat choy,” or “Gōng xǐ fā cái”. Avoid scheduling major exams or mandatory high-stakes events during the first few days of the new year when family reunions are at their peak.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may request alternative arrangements for assignments or missed responsibilities due to travel or cultural celebrations. Faculty and staff are encouraged to work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **National Museum of Asian Art:** Offers extensive resources on Lunar New Year **traditions**, including videos and educational materials.
- **Congressional Research Service (CRS):** Provides detailed fact sheets on the cultural and historical significance of the holiday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Kwanzaa

Happy Kwanzaa!

During the winter break, African American and Pan-African students, faculty, and staff observe Kwanzaa, a week-long celebration of heritage and culture. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Kwanzaa?

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration honoring African heritage and culture, observed from December 26 to January 1. Created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, the holiday was established to celebrate history, values, family, and community. The name is derived from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which translates to "first fruits," and is rooted in harvest celebrations found throughout Africa. It is a cultural observance rather than a religious one and can be enjoyed by people of all faiths.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Each day is dedicated to one of seven core principles intended to build unified and empowered communities: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).
- Celebrations incorporate various cultural practices, such as lighting the kinara (a seven-branch candle holder), sharing stories, and participating in communal singing and music.
- Important symbols used during the week include fruits, vegetables, a straw mat, ears of corn, and a communal cup.
- On December 31, the sixth day of Kwanzaa, a large communal feast called Karamu is held. Menus often feature favorite African American dishes, such as buttermilk fried chicken, baked macaroni and cheese, or red velvet cake, as well as traditional African, Caribbean, and South American recipes.
- The final day, January 1, typically concludes with gift-giving and a "Feast of Faith" (Karamu Ya Imani).

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Kwanzaa occurs annually from December 26 through January 1.
- Because the holiday falls during the standard winter break, it generally does not conflict with academic class schedules. However, staff members or students involved in winter-term research or administrative roles may request time off or a modified schedule to participate in family gatherings and community festivities.
- Observers emphasize the importance of family and community identity, and many may travel to be with extended family for the Karamu feast and other daily principle reflections.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these seven days on your calendar. Even though the university is often on a seasonal break, acknowledging the holiday fosters a sense of belonging and pride among participants.

Be Inclusive

Use the appropriate greeting: "Happy Kwanzaa!". Recognize that the ideas and concepts of the holiday are expressed in Swahili, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa.

Be Accommodating

Faculty and staff should be supportive of colleagues or students who request modified schedules or time off during the week of celebration to fulfill cultural and family obligations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Black Organizations, U-M:** A directory for connecting with African American student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) – Kwanzaa:** Provides educational videos, activities, and recipes for celebrating the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Juneteenth

Happy Juneteenth!

During the summer term, African American students, faculty, and staff observe Juneteenth, a historic milestone and national holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Juneteenth?

Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day, marks June 19, 1865, when Union troops led by Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas, with news of freedom for enslaved African Americans. This event occurred more than two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth serves as a powerful reminder of the historical legacy of emancipation and represents the principles of self-determination, citizenship, and democracy.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The holiday is celebrated through family cookouts, reunions, and community days.
- A central tradition involves consuming red foods and drinks (such as red beans and rice, strawberry pie, and red soda water), which symbolize sacrifice, transition, and power within Yoruba and Kongo cultures.
- Observances often include musical performances, highlighting spirituals and songs of survival like "Lift Every Voice and Sing", as well as faith services and storytelling.
- It is a day to recognize African American resilience and achievement while honoring the ongoing fight for human rights and equality.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- In 2021, Juneteenth was established as a federal holiday, the first new one since Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1983.
- While Juneteenth often falls during summer sessions, thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and cultural obligations throughout June.
- Common concerns include conflicts with summer class schedules, required meetings, and professional or academic opportunities such as networking and recruitment events.
- Some community members may return to their home communities to celebrate with family.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark June 19 on your calendar and syllabus. Mention the holiday at the beginning of the summer term to signal your awareness of its cultural significance.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: "Happy Juneteenth!" Recognize that June is also African American Music Appreciation Month, which is an essential part of this holiday's heritage.

Be Accommodating

Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find alternative arrangements for assignments or responsibilities if conflicts arise during this period of celebration and reflection.

5. Resources

- **Maize Black Organizations, U-M:** A directory for connecting with African American student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) – Juneteenth:** Provides digital toolkits, reading lists, and historical insights into the legacy of Juneteenth.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Diwali

Happy Diwali!

During the fall semester, students, faculty, and staff from Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist traditions celebrate Diwali, the "Festival of Lights." Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Diwali?

Diwali, or Deepavali, is a sacred holiday widely celebrated by over a billion people in India, South Asia, and across the global diaspora. The word derives from the Sanskrit terms deepa (light) and avali (row), translating to a "row of lights". While each faith has its own historical legends, the holiday universally symbolizes the victory of good over evil, inner light over spiritual darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. Many Hindus celebrate it as the return of Prince Rama to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, while others commemorate Lord Krishna's defeat of the demon Narakasura.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Diwali is generally celebrated over five days, with each day holding special significance. The third or fourth day (depending on regional tradition) is typically considered the main day of Diwali.
- Observers light diyas (clay lamps), candles, and firecrackers to symbolize the triumph of light.
- Traditions include deep cleaning homes to welcome Goddess Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), creating rangoli (colored patterns of powder, rice, or flowers on the floor), and attending services at local mandirs (temples).
- Families gather for festive meals, exchange gifts, and enjoy traditional sweets with loved ones.
- The holiday is a time for dana (charitable giving) and seva (selfless service), with observers often giving to charities and feeding those in need.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Because Diwali is synchronized with the lunar calendar, its dates vary annually, typically falling between October and November.
- Thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and religious/cultural responsibilities during this period. Requesting an accommodation for Diwali may be one of the first major interactions a student has with their professor.
- Some students and staff may request time off or a modified schedule to participate in main-day festivities or travel to be with their home communities.
- Potential concerns for the U-M community include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the dates of Diwali (mid-October to mid-November) on your calendar and mention them in your syllabus at the beginning of the semester to signal your awareness of potential observances.

Be Inclusive

Use the greeting “Happy Diwali!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific cultural and regional traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams scheduled during the main days of the festival. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu and Buddhist Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Diwali:** Provides comprehensive toolkits and fact sheets on the traditions and history of Diwali.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Hindu Fact Sheets

Ugadi / Gudi Padwa / Telugu New Year

Happy Ugadi! or Happy Gudi Padwa!

During the spring semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff observe Ugadi and Gudi Padwa, vibrant festivals that celebrate the arrival of spring and the start of a new year. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ugadi and Gudi Padwa?

Ugadi (or Yugadi) and Gudi Padwa mark the first day of the new year according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar. The name Ugadi is derived from the Sanskrit words Yuga (age) and Adi (beginning), signifying the "beginning of a new age". According to traditional legend, this is the day Lord Brahma began the creation of the universe. While the holiday celebrates the same lunar day, it is known by different regional names: Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Yugadi in Karnataka, and Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Observants typically wake up early for a traditional oil bath, wear new clothes, and decorate their homes with fresh mango leaves and colorful rangoli designs.
- In Maharashtrian tradition, families hoist a Gudi, a victory flag made of silk cloth and bamboo topped with an upside-down copper or silver vessel, outside their homes to symbolize prosperity and protection from negative energy.
- A central tradition involves preparing a special dish called Ugadi Pachadi, which combines six distinct tastes (sweet, bitter, sour, spicy, salty, and tangy). These flavors represent the mix of emotions in life, such as happiness, sorrow, and surprise, teaching that all experiences should be faced with equanimity.
- Many visit temples for Panchanga Sravanam, a ritual reading of the new year's almanac containing predictions for health, the economy, and general well-being.
- Dietary Customs: Many practitioners adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet, which excludes meat, fish, and eggs.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Because the holiday follows a lunisolar calendar, the date varies annually. For 2026, the holiday is observed on March 19.
- Thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and religious commitments during this period. For many Indian Americans, this day is essential for carrying traditions forward to the next generation.
- Some students and staff may request time off or a modified schedule to participate in communal prayers and cultural events held at local temples or community halls.
- Potential concerns for students include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar. Let students know in your syllabus that you are aware of the holiday and invite them to approach you regarding accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greetings: “Happy Ugadi” or “Happy Gudi Padwa”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific regional traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or examinations. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Giri:** A globally recognized website for authentic Hindu related content.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Rama Navami

Happy Rama Navami!

During the spring semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff will observe Rama Navami (or Ramanavami), a sacred festival celebrating the birth of Lord Rama. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Rama Navami?

Rama Navami commemorates the birth of Lord Rama, the seventh incarnation (avatar) of the god Vishnu, to King Dasharatha and Queen Kaushalya in the sacred city of Ayodhya. Rama is revered as the embodiment of divine virtues, truth, duty, love, and sacrifice and his life's journey, narrated in the ancient epic Ramayana, serves as a moral code for millions. The festival also honors important figures in his life, such as his bride Sita, and signifies the triumph of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Devotees visit temples where idols of Rama are ceremonially bathed (Rama Abhishekam) with milk, honey, and ghee, and then adorned amidst sacred chants.
- The Ramayana is brought to life through continuous readings or Ram Leelas (dramatic enactments of Rama's life).
- Devotees immerse themselves in the repetition of the Rama Taraka Mantra: "Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Jaya Rama".
- Vibrant street processions feature chariots carrying idols of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana, often accompanied by traditional music and drums.
- Many observers participate in fasting, consuming only milk or fruits, while others adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet. Consecrated food offerings, such as panakam or kosambari, are shared as prasad in communal feasts.
- In recognition of the holiday, community members often organize charitable events and meals to help the needy.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Rama Navami falls on the ninth day of the Hindu lunar month of Chaitra, typically in March or April. For 2026, the holiday is observed on March 13.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic obligations with these religious celebrations.
- For some students, asking for an accommodation for Rama Navami may be one of the first major interactions they have with a professor.
- Potential concerns for students include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal your awareness of the holiday and invite students to discuss accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Rama Navami!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific cultural and regional traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams scheduled during the festival. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **SOTC – The Essence of Ram Navami:** A detailed guide on the traditions, rituals, and regional celebrations of the holiday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Raksha Bandhan

Happy Raksha Bandhan!

During the summer and fall transition, Hindu students, faculty, and staff will observe Raksha Bandhan, a sacred ritual celebrating the enduring bond of love and protection. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Raksha Bandhan?

Raksha Bandhan, which translates from Sanskrit as the "bond of protection," is an annual festival celebrating the relationship between brothers and sisters. Known as Janai Purnima in Nepal, the holiday centers on a sister tying a threaded amulet, or rakhi, around her brother's wrist. This symbolizes the brother's oath to protect his sister and the sister's prayers for her brother's well-being. While traditionally focused on siblings, the holiday conveys a message of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, often extending to spouses, friends, and mentors.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- A sister ties a rakhi on her brother's wrist. In return, the brother offers a gift, signifying his acceptance of the duty to protect her.
- On the day of the festival, sisters customarily light a small oil lamp (arati) for the family deity and apply a religious mark (tilak) to their brother's forehead.
- It is traditional for the sister to place a sweet in her brother's mouth, a gesture he reciprocates during the ritual feeding.
- Families often gather in the presence of parents, grandparents, and extended family to celebrate these connections.
- The tradition is linked to several stories, such as Draupadi tying a piece of her sari around Lord Krishna's finger, and Goddess Lakshmi tying a thread on Bali Maharaja's arm.
- This holiday coincides with the appearance day of Lord Balarama, who is revered as the "original older brother" who guides and protects devotees.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- The holiday is observed on the full-moon day during the month of Shravana on the Hindu lunar calendar, typically falling in August.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic responsibilities with these religious and cultural obligations.
- Potential concerns for community members include conflicts with early-semester required meetings, social gatherings, and professional opportunities such as recruitment or networking events.
- For many students, asking for a holiday accommodation may be one of the first major interactions they have with their professor.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar. Let students know in your syllabus that you are aware of the holiday and invite them to approach you about potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Raksha Bandhan!”. Recognize that the specific ways students celebrate may vary based on their regional or family traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill responsibilities if conflicts arise during the festival.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Raksha Bandhan:** Provides educational toolkits and resources on Hindu holidays and festivals.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Makar Sankranti / Pongal

Happy Sankranti! or Happy Pongal!

During the winter semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff observe Makar Sankranti and Pongal, a series of vibrant winter harvest festivals celebrated throughout India. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Makar Sankranti / Pongal?

Makar Sankranti is a solar holiday commemorating the northward transition of the sun into Makar (Capricorn). Known as a "seasonal observance that is also religiously significant," the festival is celebrated under different regional names, including Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Lohri in Punjab, and Uttarayan in northern India. The holiday is primarily dedicated to Surya (the sun god), representing spiritual light and energy, and often marks the new year for many Hindus.

2. How are these holidays observed?

- In southern India, Pongal (meaning "spilling over") is a four-day festival where rice and milk are boiled in a pot until they overflow to symbolize abundance.
- Festivals like Lohri and the Bhogi festival involve building fires to honor the sun and fire gods, symbolically burning away negativity and tidying homes for a fresh start.
- In northern states, observers customarily fly kites on Uttarayan; the kite's flight is a spiritual metaphor for a soul soaring through life while remaining grounded by a connection to God.
- Because these festivals signify the end of the harvest, many farmers honor, bathe, and decorate their cattle with flower garlands and colored powders as a sign of gratitude.
- Observances include community feasts, traditional songs and dances, creating rangolis (intricate floor designs), and traveling to swim in holy rivers as a symbol of rejuvenation.

- Festive foods often include sweetened rice boiled with lentils and jaggery. Many practitioners may adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Makar Sankranti typically falls on January 14 or 15 annually.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.
- For some students, asking for a holiday accommodation may be one of the first major interactions they have with a professor.
- Potential concerns for students include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark mid-January on your calendar and syllabus to signal awareness of the holiday and invite students to discuss accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Offer traditional greetings such as “Happy Sankranti” or “Happy Pongal”. Recognize that requests may vary based on regional traditions and individual observance levels.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams due to cultural and religious obligations. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Makar Sankranti & Pongal:** Provides extensive toolkits and explainers on Hindu harvest festivals and traditions.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Maha Shivaratri

Happy Maha Shivaratri!

During the winter semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff observe Maha Shivaratri, the "Great Night of Shiva." Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Maha Shivaratri?

Maha Shivaratri is known as the "Great Night of Shiva". While a Shivaratri occurs every month before the new moon, this specific observance in the month of Phalguna is the most spiritually significant. Shiva is revered as the "God of Transformation," and the holiday commemorates several sacred events:

- Shiva's dance as Nataraja (Lord of the Dance), which symbolizes the cyclical nature of the universe, creation, maintenance, and destruction.
- The day Shiva drank the halahala poison generated from the churning of the ocean, storing it in his throat to save all beings from destruction.
- The marriage of Shiva and Parvati, representing the dynamic union of masculine and feminine energies that sparks creation.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Observants often participate in an all-night vigil called a Jagaran, remaining awake to meditate and pray.
- Devotees worship the Shivalingam (a representation of Shiva and Parvati) and make offerings of fruit, sweets, and milk.
- The day is marked by yoga, meditation, and the singing of bhajans (devotional songs) in homes and temples.
- For Kashmiri Pandits, the holiday is a 15-day celebration centered on the Vatuk Puja, involving home decoration, new clothes, and a resplendent feast.
- Many practitioners participate in all-day fasting as a form of penance and spiritual focus.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- The holiday usually falls in February or March.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic responsibilities with these religious obligations.
- Students participating in the all-night vigil or all-day fasting may experience fatigue or reduced energy levels during classes and exams.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events. Asking for an accommodation may be one of the first major interactions a student has with their professor.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and mention it in your syllabus to signal awareness and invite students to discuss accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Use the traditional greeting: “Happy Maha Shivaratri!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their level of observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill responsibilities due to fasting or late-night religious observances. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Maha Shivaratri:** Provides toolkits and explainers on Hindu festivals and spiritual traditions.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Karva Chauth

Happy Karva Chauth!

During the fall semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff will observe Karva Chauth, a cherished one-day festival predominantly celebrated in Northern and Western Indian states. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Karva Chauth?

Karva Chauth is a festival of devotion and love that encapsulates the essence of marital bonds. Traditionally, married women observe a day-long fast to pray for the longevity, safety, and good health of their husbands. The holiday also holds significance for unmarried women, who may fast in the hope of securing a desired or ideal life partner. More recently, some husbands have also begun keeping the fast to pray for their wives' health and longevity. The name is derived from "Karva" (an earthen pot with a spout) and "Chauth" (the fourth), referring to its timing on the fourth day of the waning moon.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The most central tradition is a strict 'Nirjala' fast, where observers neither eat nor drink from sunrise until the moon rises.
- In regions like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the day begins before dawn with Sargi, a pre-sunrise meal consisting of fruits, sweets, and grains. Mothers-in-law often send Bayaa, a gift of clothing, cosmetics, and food, to their daughters-in-law.
- Women traditionally wear festive traditional attire, jewelry, and apply henna (mehendi) art to their hands.
- In the afternoon, women often gather for prayers, singing devotional songs, and the thali batana ritual, where they rotate decorated plates while listening to mythological legends like the story of Veervati.
- The fast is broken only after moonrise. Women view the moon through a sieve, offer water from their karva (pot), and then receive their first sip of water and bite of food from their husbands.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Karva Chauth follows the Hindu lunar calendar and usually falls in mid-to-late October. For 2026, the holiday is observed on October 28 or 29.
- Because the fast is often undertaken without water (Nirjala), students and staff may experience fatigue or reduced energy levels during classes, exams, or labs, particularly as the day progresses toward moonrise.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this period.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with evening exams, late-day meetings, or social gatherings that involve food and drink. Asking for an accommodation may be one of the first interactions a student has with their professor.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal awareness and invite students to discuss accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Karva Chauth!”. Recognize that different students may have different levels of observance. If possible, avoid scheduling high-stakes events or mandatory social dinners on this evening.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or responsibilities due to the physical demands of the fast. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Incredible India – Karva Chauth:** A resource from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, detailing regional myths and traditions.

- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Karva Chauth:** Provides toolkits and explainers on Hindu holidays and cultural symbolism.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Holi

Happy Holi!

During the spring semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff will observe Holi, the ancient "Festival of Colors" and "Festival of Spring". Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Holi?

Holi (also known as Holaka or Phagwa) is one of the most popular Hindu festivals, marking the arrival of spring. It symbolizes love, fertility, and the triumph of good over evil. The holiday is rooted in several mythologies, including the legend of Krishna painting Radha's skin to match his own, and the story of Prahalad, whose devotion to the god Vishnu allowed him to survive a bonfire that consumed the demoness Holika.

2. How is this holiday observed?

The festival typically takes place over two days:

- On the first evening, communities light symbolic bonfires to dispel evil spirits and purify the air. Participants may apply the sacred ashes to their foreheads for protection.
- The following morning is a relaxed, joyous celebration where participants engage in playful color throwing using colored powders (gulal) and water guns (pichkaris).
- Each color used holds specific significance:
    - Red: Love, romance, and fertility.
    - Blue: Power and life (associated with the blue skin of Vishnu and Krishna).
    - Green: Happiness and nature (associated with Prince Rama).
    - Yellow: Holiness, healing, and the merchant class.
    - White: Purity, serenity, and peace.
- Holi emphasizes breaking down social barriers of age, race, and class, treating everyone as equal. The phrase "Bura na mano, Holi hai" ("Don't feel offended, it's Holi") captures the spirit of camaraderie and forgiveness.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Holi begins on the evening of the full moon in the lunar month of Phalgun, typically falling in late February or early March.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this period.
- Students may need time to prepare for rituals or travel to join their home communities.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, social gatherings, and professional opportunities like recruitment events. Asking for an accommodation may be one of the first interactions a student has with their professor.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark these dates on your calendar. Let students know in your syllabus and at the beginning of the semester that you are aware of the holiday and invite them to discuss accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Holi!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their level of observance. Avoid scheduling major exams or mandatory assignments during these times.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **EBSCO:** A leading provider of research databases.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Guru Purnima

Happy Guru Purnima!

During the summer semester, students, faculty, and staff from Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions will observe Guru Purnima, a traditional holy day dedicated to honoring teachers, scholars, and spiritual mentors. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Guru Purnima?

In Sanskrit, Guru translates to "the one who removes the darkness of our ignorance". Guru Purnima is a day to recognize the many teachers who have enlightened an individual in some way or another. The holiday holds specific significance across different faiths:

- Hindus honor Sage Vyasa, who is revered as the compiler of the Vedic literatures.
- Buddhists observe the day to honor Lord Buddha.
- Jains acknowledge it as the day Mahavir made his first follower, Gautam Swami.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- It is a time for both academic and spiritual students to pay respects and receive blessings from their chosen teachers or mentors.
- Students often visit their teachers to offer gifts of sweet delicacies, fruit, clothes, or money to honor them.
- The day is centered on expressing profound gratitude for the guidance and knowledge provided by educators throughout one's life.
- Some practitioners may adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet, which excludes meat, fish, and eggs, during the observance.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Guru Purnima takes place on the full moon (purnima) of the Hindu lunar month of Ashadha, typically falling in June or July. For 2026, the holiday is observed on July 28.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic responsibilities with these religious and cultural commitments.
- For some students, asking for a holiday accommodation may be one of the first major interactions they have with a professor.
- Potential concerns for the U-M community include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, social gatherings, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the date on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal your awareness of the holiday and invite students to approach you about potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Guru Purnima!”. Recognize that the level of observance and specific requests for accommodations may vary among individual students.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Pages – Hindu, Buddhism, and Jain, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Guru Purnima:** Provides toolkits and explainers on Hindu holidays and cultural symbolism.

- **The Times of India:** Link to Hindu Guru Purnima holiday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Ganesh Chaturthi / Vinayaka Chavithi

Happy Ganesh Chaturthi!

During the fall semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff observe Ganesh Chaturthi (also known as Vinayaka Chavithi), a ten-day festival celebrating the birth of one of Hinduism's most revered deities. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Ganesh Chaturthi?

Ganesh Chaturthi (pronounced guh-NESH cha-TUR-thee) pays homage to Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati. He is worshipped as the remover of obstacles and the god of new beginnings, prosperity, and wisdom. Because he is believed to bring order to the universe, many Hindus worship him before starting a new business enterprise, intellectual journey, or major endeavor. Historically, the festival became a major public event in the 1600s and was later revitalized in the 19th century as a symbol of the Indian independence movement.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The ten-day celebration involves four primary rituals: Prana Pratishta (invoking the deity's presence), Shodashopachara (a 16-step worship), Uttarpuja (a farewell ritual), and Ganpati Visarjan (immersion).
- Clay deities (murtis), decorated with flowers and lights, are set up in private homes and temporary public stages called pandals.
- Followers participate in chanting prayers and hymns, meditating on spiritual truths, and reading stories about Ganesha's birth. Some observers also choose to fast.
- Blessed food called prasad is distributed throughout the community. A popular sweet dish served during this time is Modak.
- On the final day, the deity is carried in a public procession with devotional music (kirtan) to a body of water for immersion. This custom, known as Ganpati

Visarjan, symbolizes Ganesha's return to his home on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- The festival is observed during the Hindu month of Bhadra (mid-August to mid-September).
- Thousands of U-M community members will endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations throughout this ten-day period.
- Before the festival begins, many individuals may need time to prepare or travel to join their home communities.
- Potential concerns for students include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, social gatherings, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the dates of the festival on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal your awareness and invite students to discuss potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Ganesh Chaturthi!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary depending on a student's specific level of religious observance.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities due to their religious commitments. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.

- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Ganesh Chaturthi:** Provides toolkits and explainers on Hindu holidays and cultural symbolism.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Vijaya Dashami / Dussehra

Happy Dussehra! or Happy Vijayadashami!

During the fall semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff observe Vijaya Dashami / Dussehra, a major festival marking the triumph of good over evil. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Vijaya Dashami / Dussehra?

Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashami (the "day of victory"), occurs on the tenth day of the Hindu month of Ashvin and marks the conclusion of the nine-night Navratri festival. The name is a composite of "Vijaya" (victory) and "Dashami" (tenth), symbolizing the goddess Durga's victory over a demon. While celebrated for various reasons across different regions, focusing on the goddess Chamundi in Karnataka or Durga in Bengal, the central theme remains the vanquishing of evil and wanton nature. Spiritually, the day represents the conquest of the three basic qualities of existence, tamas (inertia), rajas (activity), and sattva (purity) to achieve success and liberation.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Historically, the festival was a vibrant time for the whole community to mix and mingle through dances and social gatherings.
- Common practices include large public processions, elaborate light displays at temples, and the ritual burning or immersion of effigies.
- Observers emphasize a state of reverence toward all aspects of life that contribute to well-being, including the earth, air, water, and even one's own body and mind.
- Traditions often involve visiting elders, creating decorative artworks, and organizing communal feasts.
- Many practitioners adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet, which excludes meat, fish, and eggs.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Dussehra typically falls between September and October.
- Thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and religious obligations during this time. For some students, asking for an accommodation for this holiday may be one of their first major interactions with a professor.
- Many individuals need time to prepare before the holiday begins, and some students may return to their home communities to celebrate with family.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with exam/class schedules, required meetings, social gatherings, and professional opportunities such as networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the dates on your calendar and include a note in your syllabus to signal awareness and invite students to discuss potential accommodations.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greetings: “Happy Dussehra” or “Happy Vijayadashami”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific cultural and regional traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need to make alternative arrangements to turn in assignments or fulfill class responsibilities. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with Hindu student organizations on campus.
- **Association of Religious Counselors (ARC), U-M:** Provides support and guidance regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Isha Foundation:** Link to Hindu Vijaya Dashami / Dussehra holiday.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Diwali

Happy Diwali!

During the fall semester, students, faculty, and staff from Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist traditions celebrate Diwali, the "Festival of Lights." Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Diwali?

Diwali, or Deepavali, is a sacred holiday widely celebrated by over a billion people in India, South Asia, and across the global diaspora. The word derives from the Sanskrit terms deepa (light) and avali (row), translating to a "row of lights". While each faith has its own historical legends, the holiday universally symbolizes the victory of good over evil, inner light over spiritual darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. Many Hindus celebrate it as the return of Prince Rama to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, while others commemorate Lord Krishna's defeat of the demon Narakasura.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- Diwali is generally celebrated over five days, with each day holding special significance. The third or fourth day (depending on regional tradition) is typically considered the main day of Diwali.
- Observers light diyas (clay lamps), candles, and firecrackers to symbolize the triumph of light.
- Traditions include deep cleaning homes to welcome Goddess Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), creating rangoli (colored patterns of powder, rice, or flowers on the floor), and attending services at local mandirs (temples).
- Families gather for festive meals, exchange gifts, and enjoy traditional sweets with loved ones.
- The holiday is a time for dana (charitable giving) and seva (selfless service), with observers often giving to charities and feeding those in need.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Because Diwali is synchronized with the lunar calendar, its dates vary annually, typically falling between October and November.
- Thousands of community members endeavor to balance their academic and religious/cultural responsibilities during this period. Requesting an accommodation for Diwali may be one of the first major interactions a student has with their professor.
- Some students and staff may request time off or a modified schedule to participate in main-day festivities or travel to be with their home communities.
- Potential concerns for the U-M community include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional networking or recruitment events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the dates of Diwali (mid-October to mid-November) on your calendar and mention them in your syllabus at the beginning of the semester to signal your awareness of potential observances.

Be Inclusive

Use the greeting “Happy Diwali!”. Recognize that requests for accommodations may vary among students based on their specific cultural and regional traditions.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams scheduled during the main days of the festival. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations when conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu and Buddhist Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Hindu American Foundation (HAF) – Diwali:** Provides comprehensive toolkits and fact sheets on the traditions and history of Diwali.

Religious, Secular and Spiritual Life

Dashain

Happy Dashain!

During the fall semester, Hindu students, faculty, and staff of Nepali heritage observe Dashain, the longest and most significant festival in Nepal. Here's how you can support them and promote a more inclusive campus community.

1. What is Dashain?

Dashain is a 15-day festival that serves as a major homecoming for the Nepali Hindu community, emphasizing family, belonging, and the symbolic triumph of good over evil. The holiday honors the Goddess Durga (the Universal Mother Goddess), who was created from the collective energy of all the gods to defeat the demon Mahishasura. According to legend, Durga battled the demon for nine days, finally achieving victory on the tenth day. It is also celebrated as a great harvest festival and a time for fertility and prosperity.

2. How is this holiday observed?

- The festival includes a sequence of sacred events: Ghatasthapana (planting barley seeds called jamara), Phool Pati, Maha Asthami, Nawami, and the highlight, Vijaya Dashami.
- On the tenth day (Vijaya Dashami), family members don their best clothes to visit elders and receive tika, a dab of red vermilion mixed with yogurt and rice placed on the forehead, along with the jamara sprouts and blessings for progress and prosperity.
- Celebrations are marked by kite flying, playing cards, and building traditional bamboo swings called Ping, which can reach heights of 20 feet or more.
- Grand feasts are central to the holiday. While some practitioners follow a lacto-vegetarian diet, the eighth and ninth days traditionally involve animal sacrifices (water buffalo, goats, and chickens) to appease the Goddess Kali.
- The festival is characterized by a "genuine sense of community," with many people traveling to their ancestral homes to be with family.

3. How does this affect the University of Michigan?

- Dashain takes place during the Hindu month of Ashvin, typically falling in September or October.
- Thousands of community members will endeavor to balance their academic responsibilities with these deep-rooted religious and cultural obligations.
- Because Dashain is a major "homecoming" event, students and staff may need time to prepare or travel to join their families. In Nepal, cities like Kathmandu see a significant reduction in population as people head home.
- Potential concerns include conflicts with exam and class schedules, required meetings, and professional recruitment or networking events.

4. How Can I Be Supportive?

Be Aware

Mark the 15 days of Dashain on your calendar. Mention the holiday in your syllabus to invite students to discuss potential accommodations early.

Be Inclusive

Offer the traditional greeting: “Happy Dashain!”. Recognize that this is a time of "good-natured revelry" and sacred family reunion.

Be Accommodating

Understand that students may need alternative arrangements for assignments or exams due to the series of rituals and family commitments. Faculty and staff should work proactively with students to find suitable accommodations if conflicts arise.

5. Resources

- **Maize Hindu and Buddhist Organizations, U-M:** Directories for connecting with respective campus student organizations.
- **Association of Religious Counselors, U-M:** Provides support and guidance for the U-M community regarding religious and cultural diversity.
- **Nepal Tourism Board:** Official resource for the cultural history and regional rituals of Dashain.
- **Conscious Impact**: Link to Hindu Dashain holiday.