



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP
www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - January 2022

Lighting Up Leeds

THE Lord Mayor's Office has initiated a project to draw attention to the festivals of the various religious faiths in Leeds by floodlighting some of the central buildings, including the Town Hall, the Civic Hall and Leeds Museum.

In Spring 2021 Concord and Leeds Faith Forum held a consultation and made recommendations to the Council about which festivals should be marked and what colours should be used. The idea was that we would associate each religion with a unique colour. In December the Council replied, and Concord's Executive was delighted to find that our report was accepted as 'excellent' and that most of our recommendations have been accepted and implementation has already begun. Most pleasing is that all nine faiths represented in Concord will be included in the lighting scheme.

We acknowledged from the first that each faith could not expect more than about three festivals to be included and that the lighting could only be done on one or two nights, not every night of long festival seasons. We knew too that there would be clashes at times. The initial proposal for 2021-2022 was:

Bahá'í (lemon): 1st, 9th and 12th nights of Ridvan; Birthdays of The Bab and Baha' u'llah

Brahma Kumaris (pink): Founder's Day; Divali

Buddhism (saffron): Wesak/ Saka Dawa; Dharma Day

Christianity (golden yellow): 12 days of

Christmas; Holy Week & Easter Day; Pentecost Sunday

Hinduism (scarlet): Ganesh Chaturthi; Diwali; Holi; Dussehra two nights

Islam (green): Mawlid Al-Nabi; Eid-ul-Fitr; Eid-ul-Adha; Beginning of Muharram

Judaism (blue): Pesach – 8 nights; Rosh Hashanah – 2 nights; Chanukah – first 3 nights

Paganism (purple): Beltane; Samhain

Sikhism (orange): Baisakhi; Guru Nanak's Birthday; Bandhi Chhor (Divali)

This schedule is disrupted for several reasons. The lights in the Civic Hall need to be manually switched on, whereas those on the Town Hall and the Museum can be pre-programmed. This usually means that if illumination is needed on a Saturday or Sunday, the lights on the Civic will be switched on on the Friday evening and remain illuminated all weekend since there is no one available to switch them off. For dates which run across a few days, unless it is a weekend, it will generally be only one date of illumination which will be offered. Then there are civic and national events to be accommodated, such as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next June. Things also get complicated when two or more festivals clash, such as Pesach and Easter.

Choosing colours was difficult as so many faiths have a preference for shades in the red to yellow part of the spectrum. Not all of the buildings have the range

Continued overleaf

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of colour shades we wanted. Moreover within particular faiths different festivals are associated with different colours: in Christianity, for example, Good Friday should be black (impossible for floodlights) or red, Easter should be white (which is normal floodlighting and not special) or gold, and Pentecost red. Linking each religion to one consistent, unique colour seemed to be the best way to avoid complication and confusion.

Explaining to the general public the significance of the lighting presents a challenge. Initially we hope to be able to put short explanatory videos on the Big Screen in Millenium Square provided we can work around a restriction that the managers have on religious advertising. These displays will be only a couple minutes long and will compete with other content, priority being given to paid commercial advertising, so they will only show about once an hour. Efforts are being made now to organise the production of the videos. Concord's Executive would welcome input from people with technical skills as well original pictures and videos appropriate to the festivals featuring Leeds people and places of worship, illustrating the religious, cultural and social aspects of the celebration. Anything shown has to be within the Council's guidelines regarding copyright and permissions.

Ideas for other ways of disseminating information about the lighting up would also be welcomed.

The Executive proposes to add a new section to the Concord website where further information about each festival will be found.

It is good for Concord to be involved in this way in promoting multicultural understanding and mutual appreciation of the diverse traditions that enrich the life of our city and promote the development of the spirituality of us all.

JSS

12th Century Monks in Leeds: a spirituality for today?

THE VISITORS' CENTRE at Kirkstall Abbey was the ideal location for a talk on the relevance today of 12th century monastic ideals, and the Right Honourable John Battle was the ideal person to give it. John is a former MP who was responsible for interfaith matters in Tony Blair's government. He has a keen interest in community relationships in Leeds and a longstanding fascination also with the history of Leeds and particularly its spirituality.

Kirkstall Abbey, John explained, was founded in the late 12th century by Cistercian monks, who were reformers intent upon stripping back the monastic life to the first principles of simplicity which they believed had been lost. Many monasteries had become rich and lax. The Cistercians would not accept wealth from patrons. They believed in the virtue of a life of worship and work, supporting themselves by their own efforts. They built in country locations, focusing on husbandry, preferring plain dress, basic food and a strict observance of the Rule of St Benedict. Community, hospitality and stability were their key watchwords.

Kirkstall was a daughter of Fountains Abbey, built in a plain Norman style using stone from a quarry in Bramley on land given to De Lacy by William the Conqueror. John Battle outlined the economic and social conditions in its early days. It was a time of global warming when sheep farming expanded. Leeds had a population of about 1000 and two fairs a year on Leeds Bridge. Later it got colder and harder for peasants, who often faced hunger and plague. The monasteries allowed the peasantry to flourish. Lay people drained marshes, cut back trees and developed a range of small industries, such

as smelting, forging and pottery. They were major employers, medical health centres and places of learning. Many kept back 10% of the profits on sales of wool to spend on the poor and needy. Kirkstall wool was well-known and appreciated in places as far away as Antwerp and Italy. At its height Kirkstall had 500 lay brothers and 140 in the choir (i.e. religious monks under vows).

The Rule of St Benedict governed the life of the monastery. It required monks to be obedient and to practise love in community, peace and reconciliation. Life was lived in a daily routine involving worship seven times a day based particularly on the biblical psalms. Monks owned no personal possessions: they borrowed books, tools and clothing, all of which had to kept in good condition. They lived a humble and thankful life, responsibly including the poor and the sick. Their spirituality was expressed both in the way they lived their life in community and in their worship, collectively and individually, in prayer, meditation and contemplation.

How is such a life relevant now? John pointed up or implied throughout his talk

the ways in which the values that inspired that monastic life are ones we desperately need in our world still: a responsible attitude towards the environment; a radical inclusiveness and equal sharing of resources; a practical concern for and care of those whose need is greatest; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential and make a contribution, and so on. And all this is motivated, inspired, supported and sustained by worship, prayer and reflection at every moment of life.

It was a superbly structured, informative, illuminating and thoroughly researched talk, delivered with John Battle's characteristic vivaciousness, humour and eloquence—a joy to listen to. It was challenging too, for John brought out so clearly the need for everyone to contribute to community life, not leave the responsibilities to others to carry. We were greatly privileged to receive it. A recording was made, and I hope that it and/or a transcript can be made available. It certainly deserves publication to a wider audience.

JSS



Light for Leeds 2021

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 21ST was a bright, sunny day for the Light for Leeds Interfaith Week event in Kirkstall Abbey's Visitor Centre. There were display stands by the Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Brahma Kumaris and Pagan faiths as well as Concord and Leeds Faiths Forum. As a Covid-19 precaution numbers in the centre were limited and it was recommended that face-masks were worn.

'Care for the Environment' had been suggested as a theme so I'd asked Concord's faith representatives on the Executive Committee to provide a short 'environment' statement, from scriptures or other texts, to say what their faith thought and, if possible, a photograph or illustration to show what their faith community did on caring for the environment. I cut out a basic tree shape, put it on a blue background then added the quotations, the pictures, the faith symbols and gave it a title—A Tree is for Life.

Needless to say, most of the quotes were far too long, so the full versions, with the pictures, were made into booklets. These

were included in the 'goodie bag' handed to visitors as they came in.

The eventual display was mounted on a board and placed between a Concord banner and one of our rainbow flags at the far end of the room. This was the spot where the Lord Mayor of Leeds stood to give his speech which, as he looked around at the bright diversity of displays and people, turned into an impromptu talk about his early life as a young Kashmiri immigrant. Growing up in multi-faith, multi-cultural Leeds, a working-class youngster in Beeston, he never imagined that one day he would be Lord Mayor of this wonderful city.

Although the numbers were limited, a steady stream of visitors came through all afternoon and not being crowded gave people a better opportunity to look and to talk.

This year the Sikh musicians and Christian choir performed outside, with a fair few braving the cold to hear them. The Brahma Kumaris led meditative walks in the Abbey grounds as well as performing a poetry reading with musical accompaniment in the centre.

The afternoon concluded, as has become the tradition, with a silent procession to the Chapter House where we gathered round the Tree of Hope to hear the evening call to prayer—a peaceful ending to a busy day.

Cynthia Dickinson





Left: The Christian stall
Above left: The Lord Mayor
Above right: Sikh musicians
Right: Concord stall
Below: Call to Prayer in the Chapter House
More pictures can be found on our website.





Members of the Concord Executive signed a card to thank David Randolph-Horn for his contribution to Concord as a member for many years and latterly Co-Chair, wishing him well as he moves to Birmingham. John Summerwill, his Co-Chair, presented it to him in December.

Peace Service 2021

FOR THE SECOND TIME, the Annual Peace Service in October was held on Zoom. It was also on this occasion streamed live on YouTube.

The Lord Mayor of Leeds, Cllr Asghar Khan gave a brief address noting the long history of peace-making in Leeds and the city's support for its multi-ethnic, multicultural population, including asylum seekers and refugees. He himself is an immigrant from Kashmir, who was educated in Leeds and has served for a decade as Labour councillor for Burmantofts and Richmond Hill. The retiring Children's Mayor, Samuel Hill, a pupil at Carr Manor Community School, lit a candle on behalf of the children of Leeds, and the Lady Mayoress, Robina Kosa, lit one for all the people of Leeds.

The youth contribution was partly recorded, partly live, and provided by the Breaking Down Barriers Ambassadors, a steering group of young people working together to organise activities to promote peace and equality in the Harehills community by integrating young people from different backgrounds and faiths. Their presentation expressed what racism and peace mean to them.

As usual the service included a variety of prayers and affirmations which people could join in, and readings about peace from the nine faiths represented in Concord. A candle was lit on behalf of each of the nine faiths. The candles were on a table at the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Weetwood.

Music on this occasion was provided by Jay Simpson and David Midgley, two members of the Jamyang Buddhist Centre in Holbeck, who chanted three mantras.

The scripts for the service, the young people's videos and a videorecording of the whole service are on our website.

JSS

Holocaust Memorial Day

Sun 23 Jan 2022, 2pm

Online Event

ALIVE BROADCAST of this event from the City Varieties Music Hall will be taking place on Sunday 23 January at 2pm.

Hosted by the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Holocaust Memorial Day is the international day of remembrance of six million Jewish men, women and children murdered in the Holocaust, and millions more people killed under German Nazi persecution, and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The event is streamed live on <https://www.leedstownhall.co.uk/whatson-event/leeds-hmd-2022/>

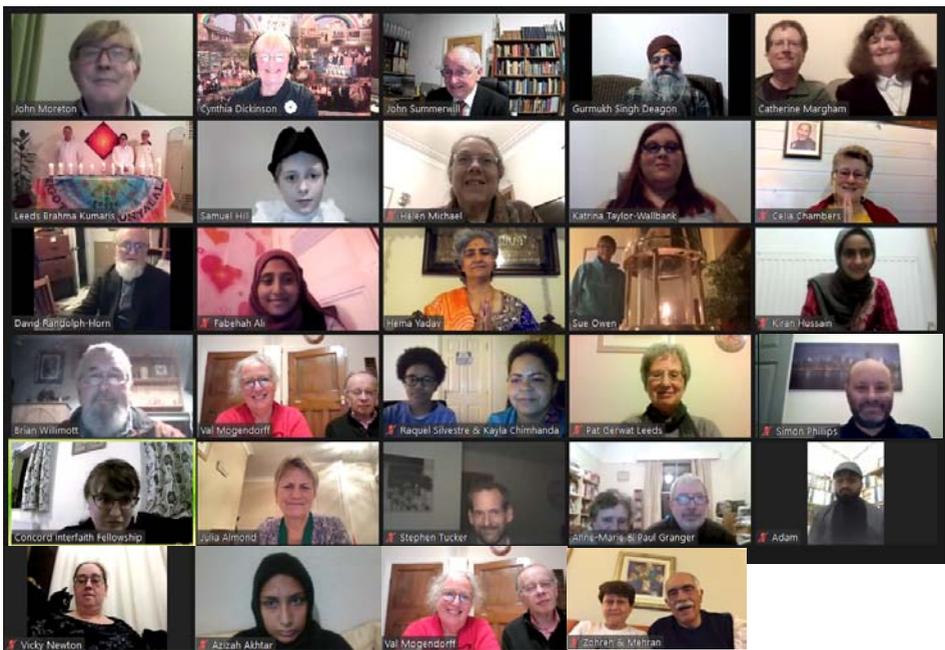


Peace Service Pictures



Above: The Lady Mayoress, the Lord Mayor and the Children's Mayor
Below: Participants in the Zoom service

Above: Jay Simpson and David Midgley, Buddhists chanters; the table with the Peace Cloth and candles



Interfaith Solidarity at the Glasgow COP26

INTERFAITH SCOTLAND declared 2021-22 a Year of Climate Action with most events, partnerships and collaborations with faith communities having a climate focus. Scottish Interfaith Week took place in the first week of COP26 and shared its theme—Together for Our Planet. Interfaith Glasgow also focussed on the climate throughout the year, culminating in a collaborative event, the Glasgow COP26 Vigil, with IF Scotland.

The multi-faith vigil took place on October 31 in George Square at the start of COP26. Leaders of nine different faith groups were invited to pray that world leaders and COP26 negotiators would have the wisdom, compassion and courage necessary to work together for the future of humanity and all life on earth.

Each of the nine prayer leaders had been asked to invite nine other people from their respective faith traditions to support and strengthen the prayers.

The weather was cool, dry and bright, a good start for this outdoor event. Seating was arranged in nine safely-spaced rows, like rays or spokes, extending from a central stage in George Square—Christian,

Buddhist, Jewish, Brahma Kumaris, Sikh, Bahá'í, Hindu, Pagan and Muslim. The event was ably hosted by the Director of IF Scotland, Dr Maureen Sier, and CEO for IF Glasgow, Dr Rose Drew (photo next page). After some multifaith prayers and the reading of IF Scotland's Multifaith Declaration and Commitment for COP26, a representative from each faith was called in turn to the platform.

As a distant observer, sitting at a computer screen in Wakefield, I had no difficulty feeling the peace and friendship emanating from the Square. The camera angle varied from viewing the full scene to close-ups of speakers to scanning the assembled participants. Whenever we saw the latter they were focused intently on whoever was speaking. The prayers were clear, concise and very meaningful, each one addressing the same theme—the value and safety of our planet, the responsibilities of those in power and the need for us all to work together—from their own faith perspective. I was most impressed by the Jewish words from Rabbi Wittenberg, co-founder of the Eco-Synagogue.





As each leader took the platform the nine supporters of that faith stood up in their row while Maureen Sier said ‘I now invite those wishing to join in the (faith) prayer, here in Glasgow or wherever you are in the world, to do so now.’

The Pagan reader was someone I had met on several occasions at a Unitarian centre in Derbyshire where Unitarian Pagans—the Earth Spirit Network—met for occasional weekends to celebrate the major Pagan festivals. I also recognised an Edinburgh PF Scotland member in the Pagan line. So when it was Linda’s turn to read, I stood along with the row of Scottish Pagans from different paths and traditions and felt myself link even closer with those in George Square. Her prayer was adapted from one written originally by a Unitarian minister (another regular at the weekend celebrations) but also included some specifically Pagan feelings about the conference in Glasgow, starting at Samhain.

It was an altogether moving experience.

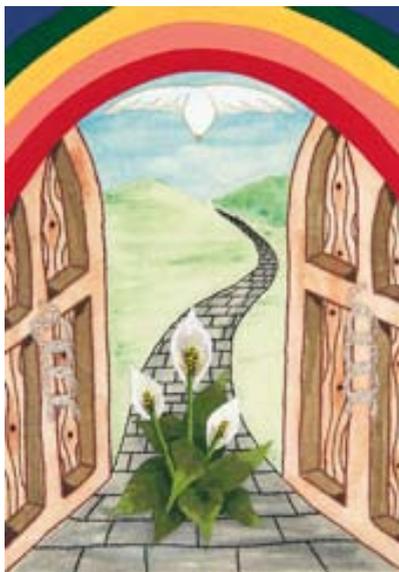
The vigil lasted under an hour and for all involved, as participants or observers, it was an hour very well spent. It can still be seen on Youtube

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9wDI36mJms>

Cynthia Dickinson

Women’s World Day of Prayer 2022

THE SERVICE for this year’s Women’s World Day of Prayer, Friday 4th March, has been written by Christian women in England, Wales and Northern Ireland based on a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylonia: ‘I know the plans I have for you’. It focuses on coming together to hear the stories of women who feel excluded, listen to the fear of a child refugee and learn to see the context of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith society. The artwork this year is a piece of embroidery by Angie Fox, designer and maker of church vestments.



Caring for Sikhs

DR SATWANT KAUR RAIT, honorary Sikh chaplain in Leeds Teaching Hospitals, has a new book due to be published at the end of January giving a comprehensive guide to support for Sikhs in NHS hospitals and hospices.

Title: *A Comprehensive Guide to Religious and Spiritual Care for Sikh Patients in NHS Hospitals and Hospices*

ISBN13: 9781838222390 392pp paperback Publisher: i2i Publishing

Available from bookshops or Amazon at £19.99 discounted to about £15.

Fun on the Water: Namaste Fund's First Project

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS, a project of the Leeds Muslim Youth Forum, aims to empower young people across Harehills to come together to organise activities that challenge racial tensions, misconceptions of the other and foster friendships. This project, supported by National Lottery funding, began in July.

The Youth Steering Committee applied successfully to the Concord Namaste fund for a grant of £150 for a local excursion—the first application the fund had received. The aim was for a group of thirteen young people to successfully plan and facilitate a sailing trip, in the hope that through food, conversation and skills-building exercises, the group would form into a much more bonded team, breaking down barriers between participants. The hope was that the participants would then come on board as BDB Champions, helping to inspire new ideas for the project to engage other young people.

On October 25th, at half term, the long-awaited trip went ahead. It was led by Dr David Randolph-Horn, who lent the use of his canal boat, BDB Project Leader Ustadh Adam Aslam, and Gab Kamei, a multi-talented youthwork volunteer who identifies with a universalist approach to faith and spirituality.

The day began with the volunteers and young people taking taxis from their meeting point in Harehills down to Castleford 11 miles away, where the boat was moored. This was an opportunity for the young people to get to know each other, including a sing-along and the start of an interfaith bingo in order to learn at least one thing about each person in their taxi. The diverse group included young people from Muslim, Christian, Jewish and no faith backgrounds, as well as an array of cultures — Caribbean, Kurdistani, Pakistani and Kashmiri.

For many of these young people, aged between 10-15, this was their first experience on a canal boat. They were kitted up with life jackets kindly provided by the sea cadets. David Randolph-Horn gave a safety talk, showed the young people around the boat, introduced boating terminology and rope tying techniques and then we were ready to go.

The youngsters had access to an inside kitchen area where a group worked alongside Gab to prep and cook a light picnic lunch, whilst others took it in turns to learn to steer the canal boat and others simply sat to take in warm weather, clear blue skies and surrounding greenery. The journey was a mere three miles in total,



along the River Aire up to Lemonroyd Lock.

One group of girls, sitting on the roof, began to create an A3 poster, inviting others to add drawings, thoughts and expressions as they built a picture of their shipmates aboard and added their feelings and new learned facts about each other to the page. Through this they became very close as they took pride in their poster. Some of the young people were particularly impressed by the friendliness of local Yorkshire folk, often waving and shouting warm words of welcome and praise as they passed us by.

At nature reserve next to Lemonroyd Lock we moored for toilet breaks followed by a fine lunch kindly led by Gab, with new friendships beginning to form as bread was shared and the young sailors took in the clear air, welcome sunshine and the sound of rustling leaves and birds in the distance.

After lunch the group, led by Adam and Gab, headed off on a mile long walk in the countryside, as the teens played in the grass and posed in front of the wetland islands, looking out for rare birds and insects. It is a totally different experience from the forest of red brick terraces and tarmac streets with which the young people are far more familiar. Yet the energy levels did not seem to fall as the group orienteered through the stretch of wetland and hills.

The day came to an end with the young people sailing the canal boat back to Castleford, where they worked as a group to tidy up the boat, remove any mess and then sit with snacks and warm drinks by the indoor fire as they reflected on the day, debated about spirituality vs religion, the lace of faith and culture in their own lives and the value of new skills learned and people met on this trip.

It was clear to see that at the start of the day there were some nerves, a concern about boredom without WiFi, the fear of bugs and a fear of not being liked, and yet by the end of the trip, on the taxi journey back to our meeting point, not a

complaint was to be heard, in part because we had finally tired the group out. It was excellent behaviour and a well-deserved trip for this group, which would not have been possible without the kindness of the Concord Namaste Fund.

Since the trip, 2/3rds of the group have been heavily involved in organising a winter welcome event in the local park for 150+ residents, a Christmas feast for over 50 young people and their families and several litter picking exercises have brought new faces to the team. The group now looks forward to growing and fostering new interfaith relationships as the New Year dawns.

"I don't get out much, and I don't really like water, or talk to kids from outside my ends. But you know what, it's weird when it's just you and a few others on a small cramped boat, surviving and sailing together. You get to see people's real side and talk to them about what makes them tick. There is no room to argue when you need to get from A to B and not crash... kids are kids, we all want the same peace and fun in life." Nadeem K. (Aged 12)

Adam Aslam



Calendar of Festivals

Spring 2022

^s Starts at sunset ~ Local dating may vary.

JANUARY		M 7	Lent Monday	Orthodox
Th 6	Epiphany			Christian
6 ^s	Nativity	W 16 ^s	Purim	Jewish
Su 9	Guru Gobind Singh birthday	Th 17	St. Patrick's Day	Christian
		17 ^s	Holi	Hindu
M 10	Bodhi Day	F 18	Cho Trul Duchen	Tibetan
W 12	Lohri			Buddhist
Th 13/14	Maghi/ Makar Sankranti		18/20 Hola Mahalla	Sikh
			18 ^s Lailat ul Bara'ah	Muslim
Su 16	World Religion Day	Su 20	Spring Equinox, Ostara	Pagan
16 ^s	Tu B'Shevat	20 ^s	NawRúz (New Year)	Bahá'í
Tu 18	Founder's Day	M 21	Higan-e	Mahayana Buddhist
	Mahayana New Year	F 25	Annunciation/Lady Day	Christian
18-25	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	Su 27	Mothering Sunday	Christian
Th 27	Holocaust Memorial Day	W 30	Magha Puja Day ~	Buddhist
	National	APRIL		
M 31	Birthday of Guru Har Rai	F 1 ^s	Ramadan begins~	Muslim
FEBRUARY		Sa 2	Hindi New Year	Hindu
Tu 1	Chinese New Year	Su 3	Passion Sunday	Christian
	Imbolc	W 6	Triratna Sangha Day	Buddhist
W 2	Candlemas: Presentation of Christ in the Temple	F 8	International Women's Day	
	Christian		Hana Matsuri	Buddhist
Th 3	Birthday of Guru Arjan	Su 10	Ramanavami	Hindu
F 4/5	Vasant Panchami		Palm Sunday	Christian
Sa 12	Birthday of Guru Angad	W 13	Baisakhi (Vaisakhi)	Sikh/Hindu
Tu 15	Paranirvana/Nirvana Day ~	13-15	Songkran	Buddhist
	Buddhist	Th 14	Maundy Thursday	Christian
W 16	Maga Puja		Mahavir Jayanti	Jain
F 25	Birthday of Guru Amar Das	F 15	Good Friday	Christian
Sa 26	Ayyami-Ha	15 ^s -22	Pesach	Jewish
	Intercalary Days	Sa 16-17	Hanuman Jayanti	Hindu
	Bahá'í	16-18	Theravadin New Year~	Buddhist
M 28 ^s	Mahashivratri			
	Lailat al Miraj			
	Hindu	Su 17	Easter Day (Western)	Christian
MARCH			Palm Sunday	Orthodox Christian
Tu 1	St David of Wales	W 20 ^s	First Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
	Shrove Tuesday	F 22	Holy Friday	Orthodox Christian
W 2	Ash Wednesday	Sa 23	St. George's Day	Christian
	Feast of Ala 19 Day fast	Su 24	Easter (Pascha)	Orthodox
Th 3	Losar			Christian
	Holla Mohalla	W 27 ^s	Yom HaShoah	Jewish
F 4	Women's World Day of Prayer		Laylat al Qadr	Muslim
	Christian	Th 28 ^s	Ninth Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í

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