



Arkansas SHRM State Diversity Newsletter December '10 Edition

This newsletter is to serve as a communication tool and a conduit between the SHRM affiliated chapters in the state of Arkansas. Please be aware of the following information and announcements.

SHRM SEASONAL OBSERVANCES



SHRM's Response: Diversity and Year-End Holidays

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act addresses religious discrimination. While it does not provide specific guidelines related to religious holidays, it lays out principles by which employers need to abide when planning for the holiday season. First, employers are prohibited from discriminating against individuals based on their religion. When dealing with holiday plans, employers specifically need to avoid creating an environment that is hostile to workers of various religions. Parties or decorations that recognize one religious holiday to the exclusion of others could put employers at risk. Employers may wish to either avoid all religious references in their decorations or parties, or to recognize a variety of religions in order to avoid alienating employees.

Employees may also wish to decorate their personal workspaces to celebrate religious or cultural holidays. Generally, employees have a right to religious expression in the workplace, though the extent of these rights remains unclear. Employers can limit an employee's freedom to decorate personal workspaces, and those limitations would apply equally to both nonreligious decorations (i.e. family pictures) and religious decorations (i.e. nativity scenes).

Employers may also encounter requests from employees whose religious beliefs mandate participation in religious holidays. Since employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation of an employee's religion, the employer would normally comply with such requests by allowing employees to use paid leave, to swap shifts with other employees, or to take unpaid leave. Only if the request created an undue hardship would the employer deny leave requests related to religious holidays.

Lastly, holiday parties and decorations are a diversity issue. When an employer is trying to do something nice for its employees such as providing a party or decorating the office, it makes sense that the employer work conscientiously to avoid offending employees or alienating employees who feel their religion or culture has been ignored.

To receive resources on this topic, please visit the [SHRM Seasonal Request Page](#).

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN DECEMBER

- **December 1 - World AIDS Day** has become an annual day of recognition of AIDS—to remember those who have died, to acknowledge the need for continued commitment to care for those who are HIV/AIDS positive and to support the research to find a cure.
- **December 6 - Ashura** (Islam) the day of Ashura or the tenth day of the first Islamic month is observed by Muslims as a whole.
- **December 8**
 - **Feast of the Immaculate Conception**; celebrated by the Roman Catholics to commemorate the Virgin Mary's conception as being without sin and therefore immaculate.
 - **Bodhi Day**; observed by the Buddhists to commemorate Gautama's attainment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, India.
- **December 10 - International Human Rights Day**, established by the United Nations in 1948, commemorates the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



- **December 12 Feast day - Our Lady of Guadalupe**; observed by the Catholic Christians commemorating the legendary appearance of the Virgin Mary near Mexico City in 1531 c.e.
- **December 13 - Saint Lucy's Day**; Roman Catholics and Greek orthodox Christians commemorate Saint Lucy the patron saint of the blind on this day. She was a virgin martyr who lived in Sicily in the third century.
- **December 16-25 - Las Posadas** (Mexico-Christian) includes processions and parties reenacting Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem.
- **December 21 - Winter Solstice** or the first day of winter occurs on or around December 22. This is the shortest day of the year in the Northern hemisphere. Yule (Christian); Yule (Wicca-northern hemisphere); Litha (Wicca-southern hemisphere)
- **December 21-28 - Chanukah [Hanukkah]** (Jewish) also known as the Festival of Lights is an eight-day festival recalling the war fought by the Maccabees in the cause of religious freedom and the rededication of the temple after recapturing it from the Syrians. Each evening candles are lit on the "menorah" (candelabra), adding one candle each night. Hanukkah is a time for playing games ("dreidel" or a spinning top is a popular Chanukah game) and singing, for visiting and for giving gifts
- **December 25 - Christmas** (Christian) is the day associated with Jesus' birth. It is celebrated on December 25 by Western churches and on January 7 the following year by Eastern Orthodox Churches.
- **December 26 – January 1 - Kwanzaa** is an African-American holiday started by Maulana Karenga, an African world scholar, in 1966. It is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called "the first fruits" celebrations, which are times of harvest, gathering, reverence, commemoration, and recommitment. Therefore, Kwanzaa is a time for achievements, reverence for the Creator and creation, commemoration of the past, recommitment to cultural ideals, and celebration of the good. Kwanza, a Swahili word, means "first," Kwanzaa, spelled with the double vowel at the end of the word, refers to the holiday. NOTE: Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday, not a religious one, thus available to and practiced by Africans of all religious faiths.
- **December 31 - Watch Night** (Christian)

For more significant dates and observances: visit: <http://www.veanea.org/multicultural-calendar/index.html>

UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES!

- Visit the SHRM Diversity website for the latest and greatest information in the field of diversity and inclusion: <http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/Diversity/Pages/default.aspx>
- Get the Diversity Inc. Newsletter: <HTTP://WWW.DIVERSITYINC.COM/PUBLIC/DEPARTMENT26.CFM>

ARKANSAS SHRM CONFERENCE REMINDER!!



I hope that you have a very safe and happy holiday season!

Thanks,
Danielle L. Wood, Ed. D.
ARSHRM Diversity Director
Dlw11@uark.edu
Phone (479) 575-4825