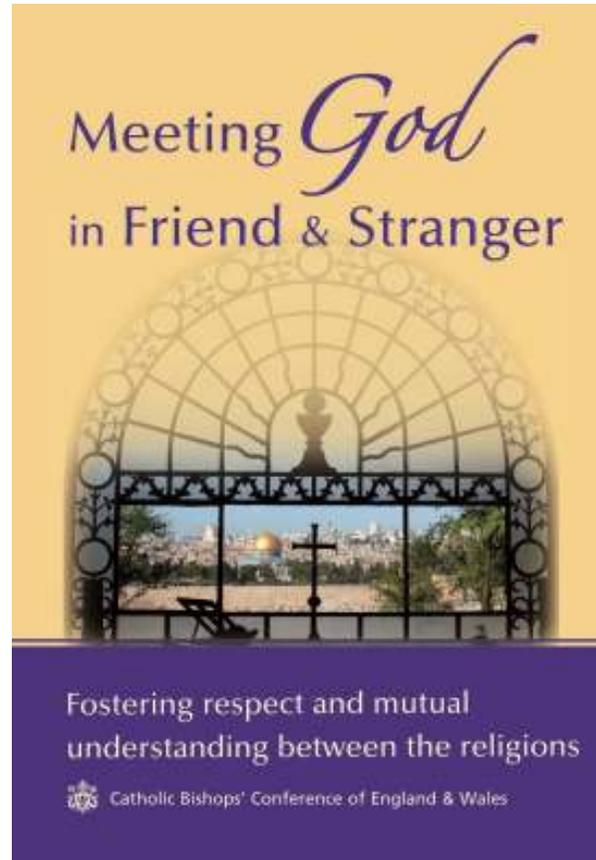


## Background

There are 350,000 Sikhs in Great Britain – many more according to some estimates – and more than 23 million Sikhs worldwide. Guru Nanak, who came into the world as the son of a Hindu family in the Punjab region, first taught the Sikh faith, stating that “higher than truth is truthful conduct”, and instructing Sikhs to earn their livelihoods by hard and honest work, whilst remembering God and sharing with others. His teachings were expounded on by all Gurus, and the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, created the order of initiated practitioners of the faith, called Khalsa. Initiated Sikhs wear five markers of identity, popularly known as “the five Ks”, demonstrating their commitment to, and practice of their faith – their uncut hair (kesh), which, in all men and some women, is covered with a turban, a wooden comb (kanga), a metal bracelet (kara), a “sword of mercy” (kirpan), and a kachera, an undergarment secured with drawstrings. On initiation, Sikhs also take on a new surname – Singh (lion) for men, and Kaur (princess) for women. These names are now often combined with other surnames, but were intended as a marker of equality. Gurudwaras (literally, the abode of the Guru) all serve langar, a free vegetarian meal that is given to anyone who comes to the place of worship. It is prepared by volunteers who see this and other selfless service to the community (“seva”) as an integral part of their faith. The Darbar (Guru’s Court / prayer hall) is entered on bare feet, and both men and women cover their heads in the presence of the Guru. Worshippers partake in parshad, sweet dough offered to all entering, which has been blessed in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture, a complete continuous reading of which traditionally takes place to celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. The day is also celebrated by the singing of hymns from early morning, and, in some towns, with processions.



*“Meeting God in Friend and Stranger. Fostering respect and mutual understanding between the religions” offers an overview over Catholic teaching on interreligious dialogue, and insights into the local situation in England and Wales.*

*It is available in its printed version from the Catholic Truth Society, online - <http://www.cts-online.org.uk/> - or at one of their shops, with the electronic version available for free download at <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/meeting-god-in-friend-and-stranger>.*

## Spiritual Riches: Bidding prayers for non-Christian religions on their major festivals (3)



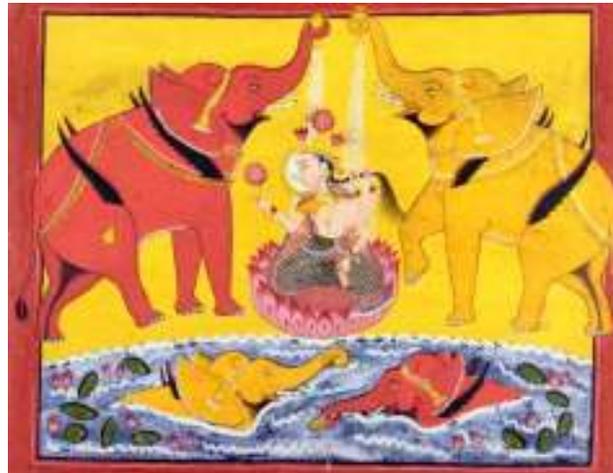
**A resource produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales**

*These leaflets offer suggestions for bidding prayers at the major festivals of non-Christian religions, along with a short text of explanation for use in parish newsletters, and some background information. In acknowledging these festivals, and praying for those who celebrate them, Catholics can express their connectedness to all people of faith, as well as the respect which the Church holds for their spiritual wealth. For further information and resources on interreligious dialogue, as well as electronic copies of these leaflets, go to <http://www.cbcew.org.uk/page.aspx?pid=458> or have a look at the Bishops' Conference blog at <http://bit.ly/PIpU4e>.*



## Background

The name Diwali means “row of lights”, as lamps are lit every day of Diwali. These lamps recall the welcome that, according to Hindu belief, was given to the just kings Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, both of whom are believed to be incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Lamps were lit when the former returned to his realm after 14 years of exile, and after Lord Krishna had gained victory over the demon Narahasur, which is celebrated on the second day of Diwali. Other days celebrate the return of five royal, and divine, brothers, the Pandavas, from exile. Houses are also cleaned, decorated and lit to make the goddess Lakshmi welcome in them, and traditional patterns, rangoli, as well as little footsteps are drawn in the entrance area to signify the expectation of her coming. Light also has a spiritual meaning – on the first day of Diwali, when it is traditional to buy gold, silver, and household goods, a wife is celebrated who saved her dying husband’s life by confusing the god of death by lighting candles and surrounding him with glittering coins and jewellery. In addition to this victory of light and life over death, Hindus believe that each being has an inner light, atman, the true self which shines in every individual, and Diwali is a celebration of this, too. The fourth day of the festival is dedicated to the



### The Hindu festival of Diwali

is celebrated during a five day period. It is one of the most important festivals of the year for Hindus, but is also celebrated, for different reasons, by the Jain, Sikh and Buddhist community.

### Bidding prayer

As Hindus in the UK, and worldwide, prepare to celebrate Diwali over the course of the coming week, we pray for them, and for all of us, that we may be a source of light in a world full of darkness.

### For the newsletter

Although traditions vary, the occasions that are celebrated on each day of Diwali, the festival of light, centre on the victory of good over evil, and light over dark. The third day of Diwali, the main festival, is dedicated to the goddess of wealth and prosperity, Lakshmi. There are roughly 550,000 Hindus in Great Britain, over half of which live in London. Hindus tend to believe in one Supreme Being with many manifestations, and a cycle of rebirths that is undergone by each individual.

relationship between husband and wife, and the fifth to the one between brothers and sisters, on which prayers are said for each other, and presents exchanged. Fireworks and fire crackers are also associated with Diwali. Hinduism is an ancient religion (some say the oldest of all) which encompasses a wide range of beliefs, but most Hindus believe in a Supreme Being who is revered and appears in different forms, leading to the common misconception that Hinduism has many gods. Hindus also believe that living a good and compassionate life will, in time, release them from the cycle of re-birth. These beliefs are based on the ancient scriptures of Hinduism, the Vedas. Many of their sentences and phrases (mantras) are repeated prayerfully to the present day.

### The Sikh festival of Guru Nanak Gurpurab

is the day on which Sikhs celebrate the Parkash Divas (birth anniversary) of Guru Nanak, the first Guru and founder of the Sikh faith.

### Bidding prayer

We pray for the Sikhs in our community who are commemorating the life of their first teacher, Guru Nanak, and celebrating his teachings of justice and equality for all. We also pray that the way our Sikh neighbours practise these ideals, and strive for their realisation in our society, may be an inspiration to all.

### For the newsletter

Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539) is the first in a line of ten gurus who taught the tenets of the Sikh faith. In 1708, the tenth guru passed this status on to the Sikh Holy Scripture, the Guru Grant Sahib. It is seen as the perpetual and eternal Guru, and is present and revered in every Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship). It is read aloud from beginning to end in celebration of Guru Nanak’s birthday. Guru Nanak promoted equality between men and women, and between adherents of different religions, gaining the friendship and respect of Hindus and Muslims alike throughout his life.