

*This edition of Voices of Excellence explores many prominent religious, cultural, and national holidays that are commemorated throughout the year, including each holiday's historic background, significance, traditions, and greetings that can be used with co-workers and clients observing these particular holidays. Holidays bring families, friends, and colleagues together each year, and keeping these important occasions in mind—even if you do not observe them all—is a great way to recognize and celebrate our differences.*

## QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

*“If we are to respect others’ religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religions is a sacred duty.”*

– Mahatma Gandhi

## 2020 DIVERSITY PARTNER COMMITTEE MEMBERS



**Sheila Gaddis, Committee Chair**  
Rochester



**Jerry Mackey, At Large**  
Rochester



**Bob Heary, At Large**  
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**Corey Auerbach**  
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**Eileen Casey**  
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Albany



**Zach Forward**  
Syracuse



**Jennifer Leonardi**  
Buffalo



**Mark Whitford**  
Rochester

## JANUARY

*New Year’s Day (January 1)* in pre-Christian Rome under the Julian calendar was dedicated to Janus, god of gateways and beginnings, for whom January is also named. As a date in the Gregorian Christian calendar, New Year’s Day marked the Feast of the Naming and Circumcision of Jesus, which is still observed in the Anglican Church and Lutheran Church. Today, New Year’s Day is often observed with fireworks at the stroke of midnight as the new year starts in each time zone. Other global traditions include making New Year’s resolutions and calling friends and family.

*Three Kings’ Day (January 6)*, otherwise known as the Feast of the Epiphany, is a Christian holiday honoring the biblical adoration of baby Jesus by the three kings, also referred to as the “three wise men” or “magi.” For many Christians, Three Kings’ Day marks the official end of the holiday season. Traditions include eating king’s bread, a round sweet bread that hides a small figurine of baby Jesus inside, and leaving out grass or salt for the camels that were said to have transported the kings to Bethlehem.

*Martin Luther King Jr. Day (third Monday of January)* is an American federal holiday that occurs around the January 15 birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., the chief spokesperson for nonviolent activism in the Civil Rights Movement that protested racial discrimination in state and federal laws. The campaign for a federal holiday in King’s honor began soon after his assassination in 1968, though it was not officially celebrated until 1986.

*Chinese New Year (One week between January 21 and February 20)*, also referred to as Spring Festival, celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional lunisolar Chinese calendar. There are public celebrations and activities such as fireworks, putting up decorations, family gatherings, and giving red envelopes—symbolizing luck—and other gifts. The most common greeting is, “Wishing you great happiness and prosperity.”

## FEBRUARY

*Presidents’ Day (third Monday of February)* is an American federal holiday celebrated in honor of George Washington, the first US president, who was born on February 22, 1732. The day is also considered as an occasion to honor all who have served as president, not just Washington, and it is recognized as a holiday in most states, with other official names including “Washington’s Birthday” and “Washington’s and Lincoln’s Birthday.”

## MARCH

*Saint Patrick’s Day (March 17)* is a cultural and religious celebration held on the traditional death date of Saint Patrick, who is the foremost patron saint of Ireland. The day commemorates Saint Patrick and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland and celebrates Irish heritage and culture. Celebrations generally involve public parades, festivals, and wearing green attire or shamrocks. Saint Patrick’s Day is celebrated in more countries than any other national festival.

## APRIL

*Good Friday (Friday before Easter)* is a Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus and his death at Calvary. It is observed during

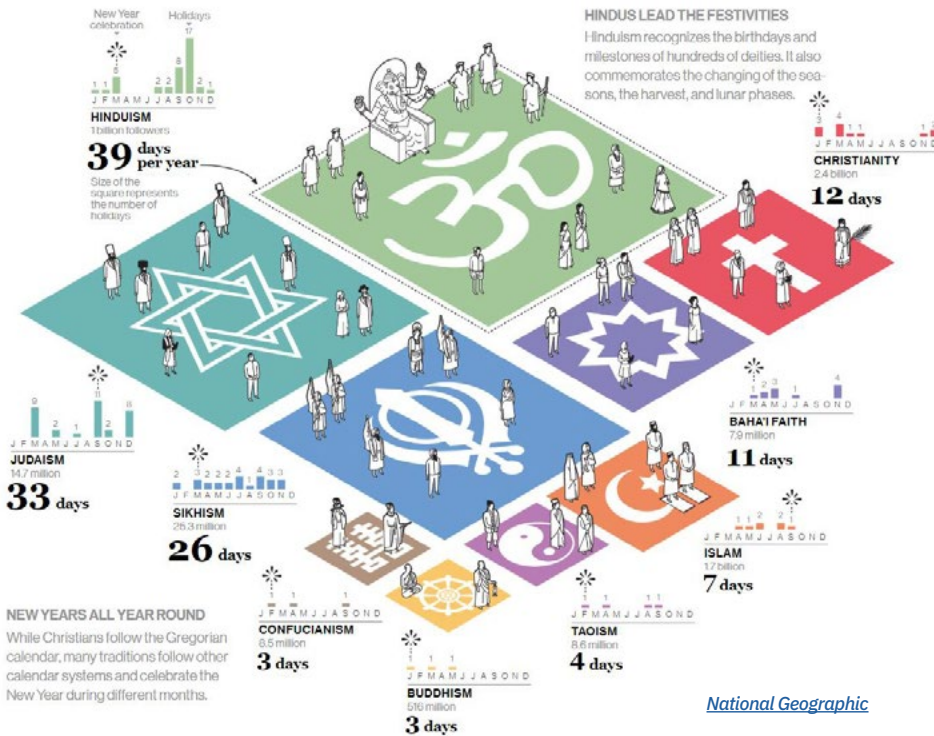
Holy Week—the week before Easter—on the Friday preceding Easter Sunday and may coincide with the Jewish observance of Passover. Good Friday is a widely instituted legal holiday around the world, including in most Western countries. Good Friday is considered the most solemn day of the year for Christians.

*Passover (15 Nisan)* is one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. Together with Shavuot and Sukkot, Passover was one of the three pilgrimage festivals (Shalosh Regalim) during which the entire population of Judah made a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. Passover commences on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Nisan and lasts for seven or eight days for Orthodox, Hasidic, and most conservative Jews. Passover rituals and celebrations commence with the Passover Seder on 15 Nisan.

*Easter (no fixed date)* is a Christian holiday commemorating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament as having occurred on the third day after his burial following his crucifixion by the Romans in 30 AD. It is preceded by Lent, a 40-day period of fasting, prayer, and penance, and Holy Week, which includes Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, commemorating the Last Supper, and Good Friday, which focuses on the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Easter, Lent, and Holy Week dates are offset from the date of Passover and calculated on a lunisolar calendar similar to the Hebrew calendar. Easter is linked to Passover by much of its symbolism and by its position in the calendar. In most European languages, Easter is actually referred to by the same words for Passover.

## Who Celebrates the Most?

With feasts, fasts, and prayers, the world's nine largest religions will collectively observe more than a hundred holidays in 2020.



## MAY

**Cinco de Mayo (May 5)** is an annual Mexican celebration observed to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza. The date has become associated with celebrating Mexican-American culture. These celebrations began in California, where they have been observed annually since 1863. In Mexico, the holiday is celebrated with military parades, battle reenactments, and arts and culinary festivals. Cinco de Mayo is sometimes mistaken for Mexico's Independence Day—which is celebrated on September 16, commemorating the start of the Mexican War of Independence.

**Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar)** is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer (*salat*), reflection, and community. A commemoration of Muhammad's first revelation, Ramadan lasts 29 to 30 days, from one sighting of the crescent moon to the next. Fasting from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan (*sawm*) is considered one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is obligatory (*fard*) for all adult Muslims who are not acutely or chronically ill, traveling, elderly, pregnant, breastfeeding, diabetic, or menstruating. The pre-dawn meal is referred to as *suhur*, and the nightly feast that breaks the fast is called *iftar*. The spiritual rewards (*thawab*) of fasting are believed to be multiplied during Ramadan, and so Muslims abstain not only from food and drink, but also

tobacco products, sex, and other behavior deemed sinful, devoting themselves instead to prayer, reciting the Quran, and performing charitable deeds as they strive for purity and heightened awareness of God (*taqwa*).

**Memorial Day (last Monday of May)** is a federal holiday in the United States for remembering and honoring military personnel who died while serving in the US Armed Forces. In observance of the holiday, many people visit cemeteries and memorials, and volunteers often place American flags on each grave site at national cemeteries. Memorial Day is considered the unofficial start of summer in the United States.

## JUNE

**Juneteenth (June 19)** is an American holiday that commemorates the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas on June 19, 1865, and, more generally, the emancipation of enslaved African Americans throughout the former confederate states. Texas was the most remote of the slave states, and the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, was not enforced there until after the Confederacy collapsed. Celebrations include public readings of the Emancipation Proclamation, singing traditional songs such as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and reading works by noted African-American writers such as Ralph Ellison and Maya Angelou.

## JULY

**Independence Day (July 4)**, colloquially known as the "Fourth of July," is a federal holiday in the United States commemorating the signing of the US Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Independence Day is commonly celebrated with fireworks, parades, barbecues, carnivals, concerts, baseball games, and family events in addition to other public and private events celebrating the history, government, and traditions of the United States.

## SEPTEMBER

**Labor Day (first Monday in September)** is a federal holiday honoring the American labor movement and the power of collective action by laborers celebrated during "Labor Day Weekend." As the trade union and labor movements grew in the late 19th century, trade unionists proposed that a day be set aside to celebrate labor. The first Labor Day parade was organized in New York and promoted by the Central Labor Union and the Knights of Labor. By the time it became an official federal holiday in 1894, 30 states officially celebrated Labor Day. A similar holiday is celebrated by more than 80 countries on May 1: International Workers' Day—the ancient European holiday of May Day.

**Rosh Hashanah (1 Tishrei)** is the Jewish New Year. It's a two-day celebration that begins on the first day of Tishrei, the seventh Hebrew month. According to the teachings of Judaism and the Torah, Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the civil year and is the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve and the inauguration of humanity's role in God's world. Rosh Hashanah customs include sounding a cleaned-out ram's horn (the *shofar*), following the Torah's instruction to "raise a noise"; attending synagogue services; reciting special liturgy about repentance (*teshuvah*); and enjoying festive foods such as apples dipped in honey, hoping to evoke a sweet new year. The common Hebrew greeting on Rosh Hashanah is "shanah tovah," which means "have a good year." "Shanah tovah umetukah," meaning "have a good and sweet year," is also used.

## OCTOBER

**Yom Kippur (10 Tishrei)**, also known as the "Day of Atonement," is the holiest day of the year in Judaism. Its central themes are atonement and repentance, with Jews asking God for the forgiveness of sins. Jews traditionally observe this day with an approximate 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services. Yom Kippur is regarded as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths." Yom Kippur completes the annual period of the High Holy Days or Days of Awe (Yamim Nora'im) that commences with Rosh Hashanah.

*Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples' Day (second Monday in October)* was created to celebrate the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival to the Americas in 1492. However, in 1992, a movement began protesting the holiday due to the colonial takeovers of the Americas leading to the death of millions of Native Americans and forced assimilation. Indigenous Peoples' Day honors the Native American population, with at least 10 states recognizing some version along with numerous colleges and more than 100 cities, towns, and counties.

*Diwali (five days in Kartika)* is a five-day-long festival of lights celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and certain Buddhists every autumn sometime between mid-October and mid-November. Diwali symbolizes the spiritual victory of "light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance." During the celebration, temples, homes, shops, and office buildings are brightly illuminated. The holiday climax occurs on the third day, coinciding with the darkest night of the Hindu month of Kartika. Celebrations include cleaning and decorating homes and workplaces with oil lamps and candles (*diya*); wearing one's finest clothes; worshipping (*puja*) Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth; lighting fireworks; and partaking in family feasts, where sweets (*mithai*) and gifts are shared.

## NOVEMBER

*Veterans Day (November 11)* is a federal holiday in the United States created to honor military veterans. Originally known as Armistice Day, it was established to recognize those who died in World War I, but after

World War II, there was a push for to expand the holiday to include all living and deceased veterans. President Eisenhower made Veterans Day an official holiday in 1954.

*Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday in November)* originated as a harvest festival of gratitude, with the event that Americans commonly call the "First Thanksgiving" being celebrated by the Pilgrims after their first harvest in the New World in October 1621. This feast lasted three days, and—as accounted by attendee Edward Winslow—90 Native Americans and 53 Pilgrims joined together in celebration. The colonists were accustomed to regularly celebrating "thanksgivings": days of prayer thanking God for blessings such as military victory or the end of a drought.

## DECEMBER

*Hanukkah (25 Kislev)* is observed for eight nights and days, starting on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. The festival is observed by lighting the candles of a candelabrum with nine branches, called a menorah (or *hanukiah*). One branch is typically placed above or below the others, and its candle (the *shamash*) is used to light the other eight. Each night, one additional candle is lit by the shamash until all eight candles are lit together on the final night of the festival. Many families exchange gifts each night, such as books or games, and Hanukkah *gelt*—money and chocolate coins—are often given to children. Other Hanukkah festivities include playing the game of dreidel and eating oil-based foods such as potato pancakes (*latkes*) and jelly donuts (*sufganiyot*) as well as dairy.

*Christmas (December 25)* is an annual holiday and festival commemorating the birth of Jesus. Christmas is a public holiday in many nations and is celebrated religiously by Christians as well as culturally by many non-Christians. Traditions include gift giving, decorating homes with lights and a Christmas tree, attending religious services, and eating with family. "Merry Christmas" is the traditional greeting.

*Kwanzaa (December 26 to January 1)* is a week-long celebration held to honor African heritage and culture. The name Kwanzaa comes from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning "first fruits of the harvest." The end of the week is celebrated with gift giving and a feast. Kwanzaa has seven core principles (*Nguzo Saba*), with each of the seven days of Kwanzaa dedicated to one principle. All seven are centered on traditions of the African harvest season. It was created by Maulana Karenga and was first celebrated in 1966. One of the holiday greetings is, "Joyous Kwanzaa!"

*New Year's Eve (December 31)*, also known as "Old Year's Day" in many countries, is celebrated at evening social gatherings where people dance, eat, drink, and watch or light fireworks. Some Christians attend a late-night service. The celebrations generally go on past midnight into New Year's Day on January 1. Tonga and Kiritimati (Christmas Island), part of Kiribati, are examples of the first places to welcome the New Year, while Baker Island in the United States is among the last.

Happy holidays to all!

## New Faces Around the Firm

(Through January 1, 2020)

### ALBANY

Annette Bell, *Paralegal and Legal Secretary*  
Kevin Bezio, *Partner*  
Eric Brenner, *Associate*  
Brienna Christiano, *Associate*  
Alexis Clement, *Counsel*  
Elizabeth Devane, *Legal Secretary*  
Michael Murphy, *Partner*  
Abigail Musco, *Legal Office Assistant*  
Shali Natesan, *Associate*  
Angela Sicker, *Law Clerk*  
Hillary Tuite, *Paralegal*  
Jennifer Uhl, *Legal Secretary*

### BUFFALO

Daniel Coleman, *Associate*  
Samantha Podlas, *Associate*

### NEW YORK

Natalie Hajinelian, *Receptionist*  
Lauren Wachtler, *Partner*

### ROCHESTER

Katie Markert, *Counsel*  
Nina Melendez, *Paralegal*  
Marianne Munslow, *Legal Secretary*  
Jessica Tariq, *Associate*  
Susie Thornton, *Trainer and Document Specialist*  
Christine Walsh, *Legal Secretary*  
Alexandra Wever, *Receptionist*

### SYRACUSE

Andrew Coughlin, *Associate*  
Janae Cummings, *Law Clerk*  
Brianna Ferguson, *Legal Secretary*  
Kimberly Fox, *Receipts Coordinator*  
David Hutter, *Associate*  
Barbara Jean Matyjasik, *Collections Coordinator*  
J. J. Pelligra, *Associate*  
Meghan Reap, *Associate*

## 2019 Diversity & Inclusion Award

Congrats to Kayla Arias, associate, on receiving the firm's 2019 Diversity & Inclusion Award! Kayla is an active member of the Syracuse office Diversity Leadership Team and a mentor in the Diversity 1L Mentoring Program. She has been recognized multiple times by the New York State Bar Association as an Empire State Counsel honoree for providing over 50 hours of annual pro bono service, and she co-chairs the Onondaga County Bar Association Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Great work, Kayla!

## Office Updates

### ALBANY OFFICE

#### **Northeast Black Law Student Association Presentation**

Kadeem Wolliaaston, associate, served as a panelist at the Northeast Black Law Student Association Upstate Academic Retreat in October, where he discussed his post-law-school career.



#### **FIESTA2 Sponsorship**

The Albany office sponsored the NY Capital Region Hispanic Chamber of Commerce FIESTA2: Creating Value and Community event on October 23 to help sponsor Hispanic students to attend Hudson Valley Community College.

#### **Equinox Annual Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner**



Many thanks to the Albany attorneys and staff who volunteered to help Equinox sort and organize ingredients for thousands of meals for its annual Thanksgiving Day community dinner. A special shout out goes to Jan Smith, paralegal, for organizing the event!

#### **Diversity Mentoring Program**

In conjunction with Albany Law School students, the Albany office kicked off its Diversity Mentoring Program with a November 14 reception. Thanks to Melissa Bennett, David Cost, Brian Culnan, Bob Hussar, Oksana Ludd, and George Pond, all partners; Brad Gallagher and Naresh Kannan, both counsel; and Eric Brenner, Dena DeFazio, Amanda Mirabito, Shali Natesan, and Kadeem Wolliaaston, all associates; for serving as mentors this year!

#### **Albany Law School Community Development Clinic**

Through the Albany Law School Community Development Clinic, Connie Cahill, deputy managing partner and Public Finance Practice Area chair; Brian Culnan and Oksana Ludd, both partners; Margaret Surowka, counsel; and Amanda Mirabito, associate, donated pro bono legal services to individuals looking for advice on starting or expanding small businesses.

#### **Black and Latin American Law Students Associations Presentation**

David Cost and Oksana Ludd, both partners; Naresh Kannan, counsel; and Brenda Baddam and Kadeem Wolliaaston, both associates, presented to the Albany Law School Black and Latin American Law Students Associations about their legal practices during a joint meeting hosted at the Albany office for members.

### BUFFALO OFFICE

#### **Jeans Days**

The Buffalo and Clarence offices hosted four Jeans Days from October through December to benefit the Compass House, Wounded Warriors, Haven House, Journey's End Refugee Services, and Plymouth Crossroads.

#### **Champions for Justice Bash**

The Bar Association of Erie County Volunteer Lawyers Project held its annual Champions for Justice Bash in November, with Bob Heary, Labor & Employment Practice Area chair, and Bridget Steele, associate, attending. Bob is a board of directors member, and Bridget is a Rising Champions for Justice board member. The Buffalo and Clarence offices regularly partner with the VLP on pro bono work.



#### **Project Warm Your Heart**

The Buffalo and Clarence offices held their seventh annual mitten, glove, hat, and scarf drive, donating warm winter accessories to Haven House, which serves domestic violence survivors, and Journey's End Refugee Services, which supports and provides resources to refugees in the WNY community.

#### **Bar Association of Erie County Yuletide Challenge Toy Drive**

The Buffalo and Clarence offices supported the Bar Association of Erie County Young Lawyers Committee's annual toy drive, which benefits the Legal Aid Bureau's Attorneys for Children Unit. More than 800 toys were collected during the drive for kids involved in abuse and neglect proceedings.

### ROCHESTER OFFICE

#### **Adopt-a-Family Program**

The Rochester office participated in Cameron Ministries' Adopt-a-Family program during the holiday season, donating gifts for families living in poverty.



#### **Community Day**

The Rochester office annual Community Day took place at Washington Grove, with attorneys and staff helping with trail maintenance and removing invasive species such as lily of the valley, honeysuckle, and Norway maples. Andrew Seager, Friends of Washington Grove president, also led volunteers on a tour of the grove and up to the top of Cobbs Hill Reservoir.

#### **Jeans Days**

The Rochester office hosted Jeans Days to benefit the Legal Aid of Rochester, the Wilmot Cancer Center, and NCBI Rochester.

### SYRACUSE OFFICE

#### **United Way of CNY Emerging Leaders United Reception**

The Syracuse office hosted a reception on the Barclay Damon Rooftop Terrace on September 25 for the launch of the United Way of CNY Emerging Leaders United group, which is comprised of young professionals committed to getting involved with and giving back to the CNY community.

#### **Diversity 1L Mentoring Program**

In partnership with the Syracuse University College of Law, the Syracuse office launched its third annual Diversity 1L Mentoring Program. The program connects firm attorneys with 1Ls from historically underrepresented groups within the legal profession.

#### **Jeans Days**

The Syracuse office raised over \$1,100 through Jeans Days to benefit the Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation; Elise's Corner, which supports research efforts working to identify treatments, therapies, and a cure for Alexander disease and other leukodystrophies; Boys and Girls Club of Syracuse, and Big Brothers Big Sisters.



#### **Share the Warmth From Head to Toe**

The Syracuse office held its 2019 Share the Warmth From Head to Toe holiday drive, collecting winter hats, gloves, and socks in December for the Samaritan Center, a local not-for-profit that serves the hungry and those in need in order to promote their welfare, dignity, and self-sufficiency.