

5 Days of Prayer for Sikhs

APRIL 12-16, 2023



Sikh World Prayer Guide 2023

About 28 million people in the world identify as Sikhs. This makes Sikhism the 5th largest organized religion by population.

Most Sikhs live in India, particularly in their homeland state of Punjab, but millions have emigrated all over the world. Wherever you live, it is likely there are Sikhs nearby - living, studying and working alongside you. The Sikh community is very friendly and welcoming. They are hard-working, value family relationships, and are generous to those within and outside their community.

As disciples of Christ, we want to share the truth we have found in Christ with the Sikh people around us and be a reflection of His love. This longing reflects God's heart, that all people may know His love and be reconciled to Him through Jesus. This guide will help you, as a Christian, learn more about Sikhs and how to pray for them with greater understanding. It will also encourage you to pray for Sikhs around the world to have the opportunity to hear the gospel. This guide can be used to pray at any time during the year, but an especially important time to pray is at the time of the Sikh festival, Vaisakhi,

which begins April 14. Vaisakhi is a harvest festival, and we can ask the Lord of the harvest to see much fruit during this time.

Thank you for praying with us!

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

MATTHEW 9:37-38

The Significance of Vaisakhi

Vaisakhi is the most celebrated festival among Sikhs. It is named after the month (Vaisakhi) in which it's celebrated. Before Sikhs adopted it as a special festival, it was a harvest celebration and took place in the spring around the 13th or 14th of April each year.

In 1699, the Sikh teacher, or, *guru*, Gobind Rai, who later became known as guru Gobind Singh, gave the traditional harvest festival a new significance by challenging Sikhs to do two things. First, he asked Sikh men to grow a full beard and come to the harvest celebration in 1699. The guru wanted his followers to be recognized in the crowd. Second, on the day of the celebrations, he stood before the gathering of Sikhs and challenged them to come forward and be ready to lay down their lives at the command of their guru. Five Sikhs came forward and were given a symbolic

nectar, made by mixing sugar in water with a sword. This ceremony is known as *Amrit Shakna* and its purpose was to equip the Sikhs with power to defend themselves with bravery and protect the weak in society. These men were ordained as the *Panj Piaras* (five beloved ones) to be the spiritual leaders of the Sikh community. This event marked the beginning of the *Khalsa Panth* (way of the pure) Sikh community.

Vaisakhi celebrations in the UK

Sikhs commemorate this event and celebrate Vaisakhi throughout the world. For example, in Trafalgar Square in London, England, thousands of people turned up for Vaisakhi celebrations from all over the country in April 2022. There was music, martial arts, Bhangra folk dances, activities for children, and langar (free food for everyone).

Pray that Sikhs will understand that Jesus offers the greatest celebration, where every tribe and tongue will one day rejoice in eternal liberation from sin, connected with God forever.

"We Will Feast in the House of Zion A people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more."

ISAIAH 30:19

What do Sikhs Believe?

Sikhism was founded around 500 years ago by Guru Nanak. Since that time Sikhism has grown into the fifth largest religion in the world. It is often confused in the west with Islam - because devout Sikh men cover their heads with a turban; or Hinduism - because it originates from the Indian subcontinent. But Sikhism is a unique religion with a distinct theology and practice of beliefs.

Central to Sikh beliefs is "Ik Onkar," meaning "there is only one God." Sikhs believe that all religions worship the same divine being, each in their own way, and that ultimately all religions lead to the same God. This "oneness" of God defines how Sikhs relate with people since they believe that all people are God's children. In an example of how this belief is expressed, Guru Nanak helped to abolish the caste system among his followers in India, encouraging people to

come together regardless of their caste and eat together - a practice which was unthinkable at the time in the Hindu dominated country.

A baptized Sikh is someone who commits to following the way of Sikhism by wearing the five symbols of Sikhism and not cutting their hair. One of these symbols is the kirpan - a dagger or sword. Sikhism is a peaceful religion with most practitioners even refusing to eat any meat. However, the willingness and even compulsion, to protect oneself or another person - with force, if necessary, is a vital part of Sikh teaching. Sikhism was born in the midst of the conflict between the Muslim Mogul empire and the Hindu subcontinent, and its teachings heavily emphasize Miri Piri - a concept of worldly power and spiritual authority. The kirpan is worn as a symbol of a Sikh's willingness to defend themselves and others if the need arises.

Pray that Sikhs will see that the ultimate oppression is wages of sin that leads to death, and Jesus has paid the ransom for those who repent and call upon His name.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

ROMANS 6:23

Sikh women in Argentina

The Sikh community in Argentina began to arrive in the early nineteenth century to work on the construction of railways by the English. In the 1970's a new wave of Sikhs arrived for job opportunities in different fields, bringing their families over with them after finding economic success.

This was the story of Charai Kaur, who arrived in Argentina 5 years after her husband with their 4-year-old son. The role of the Sikh woman in Argentina is the same as it was expected to be in Punjab - taking care of the family, cooking and looking after the home. Charai learned Spanish, and works at home as a writer. She raised three children while her husband, Charan, has a supermarket in northern Argentina town, which provides work for many other families. Every Sunday they gather at the Sikh temple that they

themselves helped to build. Charai represents the many Sikh women who migrate with their families for greater economic opportunities. And although they live in cultures so different from their own, they maintain their warmth, hospitality and friendliness.



HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Pray for Sikh women in Argentina to be blessed and encouraged as they build their homes and serve their communities.

Pray for every Sikh woman to receive the message of Jesus Christ through Christian friends and neighbors.

Pray that Christian women will build bridges of friendship with Sikh women and share the Good News with them.

Sikh Children of India

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the education system in India suffered significantly. Children were not able to attend school in-person for two years, and were often stuck at home for months on end during lockdowns.

Many Sikh children living in India attempted to make progress with their studies at home by receiving daily homework via text messages and attending the occasional online class. As Sikh children have returned to the classroom in 2022, teachers are assessing where each child has gaps and attempting to fill those gaps in while not delaying their progress forward in their current grade.

Not only has the online schooling system resulted in a generation of children who are academically behind, but they have also become dependent on online devices. Some parents are concerned that their children spend too much time watching shows and playing games on their phones rather than engaging in other activities. Parents, teachers and children are all adapting to the changes and losses that happened during the pandemic and navigating a new world.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Pray for the Sikh children of India to hear of the saving grace of Jesus with eager ears and that they would respond in faith.

A generation of Sikh children have lost months of learning and many have also lost loved ones. Pray for those who are recovering from the impact of Covid-19 in their homes and communities.

Pray for the education system in India to wisely evaluate and adjust to address academic concerns and enable this generation to thrive in the years to come.

Sikh Business people in the Philippines

Among the fast-growing Indian population in the Philippines, the majority are Sikh business people from Punjab. They travel to the Philippines with aspirations to earn more money to support a better lifestyle and support their families back in India.

Sikhs began coming to the Philippines before World War II, but their community has grown most rapidly in the last decade. The socio-political and economic situation in India encourages them to leave their home nation, and it is relatively easy to get a visa to work and live in the Philippines, even if it is necessary to sell properties or borrow money from others to do so.

Upon coming to the Philippines, many Sikhs find that their situation is not as it was promised to them. They face many challenges in setting up a business and acquiring a long-term visa. This can lead

them to fall prey to the schemes of scam agents where they lose their money or get involved in a scam marriage. Some business people have to deal with corruption or criminal behavior that leaves them at a loss and without the means to recover their capital. This can lead to other problems in marriages, with visas and even the threat of violence from criminals who prey on immigrant workers. Within the Sikh community in the Philippines there have been reports of violence and even of suicide among those who have lost everything.

Despite these experiences, other Sikhs from India have managed to earn an income and build a life, with the community growing. The church in the Philippines is considering how to create opportunities to reach out and share the love of Jesus with them.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Churches need more help, strategic ministry ideas and effective resources to minister to the Sikh community in the Philippines.

Pray for Sikh business people in the Philippines to be protected from criminals and scams, and instead be introduced to those who would befriend them and tell them the gospel.

Pray for more Sikh background leaders to pioneer Christian ministry among Sikh business people throughout the Philippines.

Migrant workers in the Middle East

"We all come from the Punjab in northern India", said Kirpal Singh, a 30-year-old construction worker who lives in one of the labor camps on the desert outskirts of Dubai.

Together with thousands of others he commutes early into Dubai for a 14-hour workday. On Fridays, they work half a day and spend the afternoon washing clothes, watching Bollywood movies, calling home and doing their weekly shopping at a nearby supermarket. Their meager wages go far in their homeland. *"A few years working in Dubai could mean building a house for my family, buying a plot of land or sending our two children to school",* says Kirpal. Yet many men escape poverty back home only to find themselves trapped in precarious working conditions.

Dubai's amazing building boom has been fueled by millions of migrant workers from villages in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. An estimated 70 percent of the 8 million Indians living in the Middle East work in low-skilled and low-wage jobs, as construction workers, the service industry or as domestic workers.

Some Punjabis manage to attend Sangat, the gathering of the Sikh community for prayer and worship at the new *Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara* in Dubai. It was opened in 2012 and is the first and largest official Sikh Gurdwara in Dubai. It serves the more than 50,000 Sikhs who live in Dubai. There is a great need to share God's love with many migrant workers in Dubai and elsewhere in the Middle East.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Pray for Sikhs and the other migrants they work with to encounter Jesus who says: *"Come to me...and I will give you rest."*

Pray for several churches who are built just around the corner from the Gurdwara, in Dubai, that they will catch a vision to serve the Sikh community and reach out to those who are far from home.

Pray for more laborers in the Dubai and Middle East harvest field among Sikh migrants.

International Students in Canada

For decades, Canadian universities and colleges have attracted many students from India, but in recent years that number has surged exponentially. Over 217,000 student visas were issued to Indian students in 2021, and over half of these students are from Punjab State, the motherland of the Sikhs. Attracted by dreams of marketable degrees, jobs, prosperity, and the goal of eventually becoming Canadian citizens, many Sikh families go into shocking debt to send their children to study in Canada. Stories are very common of Sikh families spending their life savings, selling assets and even mortgaging their family farms in order to pay for a year of tuition for a family member.

The pictures that Gurdeep Singh sends to his family back in India show a confident young man with expensive clothes, enjoying the scenery of Canada

with fellow Sikh students. The reality of his experience in Canada, studying at a college in Ontario, has unfortunately been much different. The harsh cold climate, high cost of living, isolation from his tight-knit family and the crushing pressure to be worthy of his family's financial sacrifices have led to mental health struggles. He knows many other students who have been exploited by employers who take advantage of their financial needs and lack of understanding of Canadian laws.

When asked if he would consider moving back to India, he is emphatic: *"My family has sacrificed so much for me. I must make a life for myself here and bring honor to them."*



HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Pray for the tens of thousands of Sikh international students studying in Canada, to know the nearness of God and find encouragement and peace.

Pray for opportunities for Canadian Christians to care for Sikh students in their financial, emotional and academic challenges.

Pray that the *"cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches"* would not be allowed to hinder God's work in these students' hearts.

What Next?

God's Word tells us in John 14:6 that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to Father except through him. This testimony tells a story of how God brought freedom into one man's life as he found the truth he has been seeking.

"I had always believed in the existence of God. I also knew I was a sinner, but I continued to live in my sin even while seeking freedom from sin. God presented me with an occasion to find freedom while I was performing military service in Singapore. I was charged for an offence I committed which cost me many days in military detention. My bed was an uncomfortable wooden plank with no pillow.

I requested a Bible from a Christian friend, intending to use it as a pillow. As I flipped through the pages, the words had a profound impact on my life. I began to reflect on my sinfulness; I pondered my life, wondering what would become of me when I die, being certain there was no way I could save myself. I remembered the words of a friend who once told me that I could sincerely talk to God just as I could to any other person. I knelt on that wooden board, and I lifted

my hands towards God and prayed for the forgiveness of my sins that He gave me through Christ. The cold silent cell became a haven of peace. Since that day I have realized two things. First, truth does matter. Truth liberates but deception enslaves. Second, the passion for truth was also the driving force behind the Sikh's gurus. The truth they seek is something I found in Christ."

Would you continue praying for the millions of Sikhs worldwide?

*Ask the Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus.
He is able to save all who call on Him.*

Sikhism Around the World

Approximately 28 million people identify as Sikhs worldwide. The majority of them, over 23 million, live in India - 76% of these live in the northern state of Punjab. The remaining millions are scattered around the world.

The largest populations of Sikhs outside of India are in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States; these three countries combined have over 2 million Sikhs. Other countries with sizeable Sikh populations are Italy, Australia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, and New Zealand. There is also a significant number of Sikhs in East Africa and in South Africa.

Over the last decade the Sikh community in the Middle East has grown significantly. In the UAE there are more than 100,000 Sikhs, with smaller communities in other Gulf countries. Many Sikh men are easily recognizable by their neatly tied turban and beards. Those who do not wear a turban, both men and women, can often be identified by the steel bangle, known as kara in the Punjabi language, which is worn on their wrist.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

Pray that Christians will grow in their love for the Sikhs who live and work around them.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give believers opportunities to share God's love and their faith in a meaningful way.

Get to know your Sikh neighbors

The Punjabi community has spread across the world. Some say that, as with the British Empire, *"The sun never sets on the Punjabi Diaspora"*. There is a very good chance that there is a Punjabi Sikh person in your neighborhood, in your school, in your doctor's office, running your local convenience store, or walking laps around your local park.

As you have spent the last several days learning about, and praying for the Sikhs, we encourage you to make the effort to meet some. Invite them into your home for tea and get to know them and show them the love of Christ.

Pray for the Church to see and display the love of Jesus to the Sikh community.

Punjabi Cha (Tea) Recipe

Ingredients

- 2 cups water
- 3 whole cloves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 to 4 Green Cardamom pods (cracked open)
- 4 tablespoons of loose black tea (or 4 tea bags)
- 2 cups whole milk
- 4 tablespoons of sugar (as per taste)

Love your neighbor as yourself.

MARK 12:31

Preparation

- Add the water to a saucepan and heat it on medium heat
- Add the cloves, cinnamon, and cardamom.
- Once the water starts boiling, add the tea and let it boil again.
- Now add the milk and the sugar and bring it back to boil.
- Reduce heat, and let it simmer for 5 minutes.
- Strain and serve it hot with a friend.

With thanks to our contributors and sponsors

If you would like to learn more ways to pray for Sikhs and receive resources on how to share the gospel with them, contact us at Sikh.WPG@gmail.com

We will be happy to co-labor with you in this way.

