

## **ORGANIZING AN OPEN HOUSE AT THE GURDWARA SAHIB**

*This guide lists suggestions, things to consider, and sample documents to help you organize an open house at your gurdwara in the wake of the tragic attacks on the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek. Keep in mind, that planning a successful open house will require time, hard work, and a number of volunteers for the event. For your ease, we have divided this tool kit into three parts: Before the Event, Day-of-Event, and Follow Up.*

### **You will need:**

#### **Volunteers**

#### **Printed Materials (Included in this packet)**

## **BEFORE THE EVENT**

### **1. Set up a Host Committee & Teams**

Your Host Committee should consist of the following teams:

- (1) Project Coordinator -- this person should ensure that all the logistics are being taken care of
- (2) Outreach -- these people should reach out to guests and invite them to the gurdwara and conduct follow up
- (3) Greeters -- these people should greet guests at the gurdwara door and thank guests when they leave
- (3) Guides -- these individuals should guide a group of visitors throughout the program until they leave
- (4) Snacks & Langar Team -- these individuals should ensure that there are enough snacks available throughout the event, coordinate langar seva, and describe the food to the guests
- (5) Media & Press Team -- these individuals should be comfortable talking to any members of any faith community, with strong English communication skills.

You should pick a team leader for each team.

We recommend you have 1 volunteer for every 5-10 visitors. For example, 5 greeters if 50 people are expected; 7 ambassadors to take groups of 7 each; 5 individuals taking care of langar.

### **2. Pick a Date & Time**

*We recommend you pick a date at least three weeks from the date you begin planning the event to allow time to invite people and prepare. Please try not to schedule this during an existing Sikh holiday to avoid further complications, as it might prove to be difficult to alter the diwan on that day.*

### 3. Inviting Guests

Deliver an invitation to every congregation in person and leave flyers. A sample of each is attached. *Keep in mind that recipients and people who see the materials may not be familiar with Sikhism, Sikh and Punjabi terms, or Sikh symbols.*

Call the place of worship to initiate contact with their community leaders. Then, set up time to go and visit the congregations so you are able to invite them in person. We encourage you to coordinate so that they are able to bring numerous people from their congregation, almost like a field trip! This will ensure that there will be sufficient attendance for the event. We also encourage inviting more than one faith group at a time, as it gives you an opportunity to create a more diverse event.

### 4. Recommended guests to invite

- Your local government's Interfaith or Community Liaison
- The congregations & priests of all churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples within your area (*we recommend you invite all within at least a 5 mile radius of the gurdwara*)
- The people who live in the neighborhood surrounding the gurdwara
- Other non-profits & service organizations in your area, such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the Food Bank, etc.
- Local elected officials

### 5. Reach out to the local police

Inform of the date and time of your open house. Ask them to send an officer to help direct traffic during the day.

### 6. Reach out to the local media

Send out a press release to local newspapers and magazines, radio stations, and TV stations. You can find their contact information on their websites. Use the sample press release included in this packet as a guide.

### 7. Prepare for the number of people you expect to attend based on the RSVPs

Make sure you have enough food and print-outs.

8. Hold a volunteer meeting to go over all the roles and ensure everyone is ready and comfortable to answer questions about Sikhism and practices at the gurdwara. Use the resources at [saldef.org](http://saldef.org) as a guide.

9. Confirm their attendance with your contact at the local church, etc.

## DURING THE EVENT

Have volunteers directing traffic in the parking lot to help people find spaces. Ensure they wear reflective safety vests if needed.

When a guest arrives:

- The Greeters should welcome them
  - Ask them to sign in: Name, Address, Email, and House of Worship
  - Share the following documents: (available at the end of this packet)
    - Guide to Sikh Americans
    - Sikh American Fact Sheet
    - Guide to the Gurdwara
    - Translation of Ardaas
    - Any shabads you may have printed out that will be sung during their visit
  - Give the guest something to cover their head with and explain why people cover their heads when coming into the gurdwara
  - Show the guests where to take off their shoes and explain why
- The Greeters should then introduce them to a Guide

The Guide should stay with their group throughout their time at the Gurdwara.

- Take them to the *langar* hall for snacks, let them review the information they were given, and give them an overview of the program they will see in the gurdwara
- Give them guidance on what they will see in the *Diwan* hall before you go in
  - Explain why everyone sits on the floor
  - Point out the Guru Granth Sahib and explain that worshippers bow as a sign of respect but inform them they are not required to do so
  - Tell them they do not have to bow during *ardaas* but are asked to stand with the congregation as a sign of respect
  - Describe the reading of the *vaak* and let them know they do not have to have the *karah parshad* or they may request a little. Ensure that the visitor understands that Sikhs accept *karah parsad* as a blessing to accept the *hukam*(divine order) of the day, and it is not disrespectful for them to politely refuse.
  - Sit with them in the *diwan* hall to answer any questions that arise during the service
- Tell them you will take them to *langar* after the service. Explain *langar* and describe what they will encounter.
  - Inform them that the meal served is vegetarian
  - Enjoy *langar* with them.
- After *langar* and the *Diwan* is finished, we recommend you bring them back to the *Diwan* hall to answer any more questions, and to take them to the *palki* to show them the Guru Granth Sahib and to the stage so they can view the musical instruments.

### Recommendations for the *Diwan*

- We recommend announcing *langar* at least twice before the end of the program.
- We recommend providing a printed sheet of translated *shabad kirtan* of the day in addition to any projecting or screen display.
- We recommend keeping *shabad kirtan* for this day simple, so that volunteers and organizers are able to adequately answer any questions that may come up during the visit about the meaning of the *shabad*.
- We recommend shortening the *diwan* schedule, as it may be difficult for outside attendees to sit on the floor
- We recommend preparing short explanations in English (*katha*) to be read during *kirtan*
- We recommend reciting *ardaas* in English, just for this event ([Attachment provided](#))
- We recommend announcing the correct protocol for while *hukam* is being taken. Also, take this opportunity to simply explain that *hukam* is the divine order of the day for all Sikhs. If possible, please share a translation in English.

### Recommendations for *Langar*

- We recommend sharing with them the importance of *pangat*.
- We recommend emphasizing that everyone is viewed equally, hence the sitting on the floor while we do important things-- pray and eat.
- Ensure you ask if anyone is allergic to anything specific, or has special dietary needs.

### When the guests are ready to leave

- Greeters should thank them for coming and answer any more questions they have.
- Help them find their shoes and take their head coverings for them.



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### **AFTER THE EVENT**

- Follow up by sending a thank you letter to their address
- Visit the different churches or temple they came from and thank the congregation for visiting
- Work with their church to organize a visit from your gurdwara sangat to learn more about your neighbors. Please remember in order to foster these relationships; it is useful to make the same effort of attending their event as they did for yours.



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## MATERIALS

### SAMPLE INVITATION

Hello (**Insert Congregation/Faith Community Name**),

I would like to invite you to the (**insert Gurdwara/Sikh Center/Community Center Name**) located in (**City, State**). We have been part of the (**insert City, area**) location for the last (**number of years**) and are eager to invite you to our gurdwara (Sikh temple) to share some information and experiences about the Sikh American community.

We wish to extend an invitation to you and your congregation to come and visit our *gurdwara* (Sikh Temple) during our 'open house' event on (**insert date**). We believe in creating and fostering relationships with our extended neighbors, and are specially arranging this event in the spirit of interfaith education and awareness.

Given a surge in violence against places of worship, the Sikh American community of (**insert location here**) would be honored to have members of your congregation attend this event. We have also extended invitations to various neighboring faith communities, and would appreciate your participation in our open house.

Please feel free to contact me directly via (**Contact person, phone number and email**).

I, as well as the entire congregation at (**insert gurdwara**) look forward to hosting you.

Best,  
Contact person  
Gurdwara  
Address to Gurdwara  
Common questions



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## **SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE**

*Please fill in the information on this press release and send it to your local media – including newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. You can find their contact information on their websites.*

### **Sikh Gurdwara (Temple) to Hold Open House on DATE**

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – YOUR CITY, STATE)]

The congregation of the Sikh gurdwara (temple), NAME OF GURDWARA, will be holding an open house at to help introduce themselves to their neighbors and answer questions about their religion.

DATE: INSERT THE DATE

TIME: INSERT THE TIME

LOCATION:

INSERT THE ADDRESS

On August 5, 2012, the nation was rocked by the tragic attack on the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek. Since the attack, many in the area have wanted to learn more about the Sikh American community. The congregation at GURDWARA NAME is holding an open house for all to attend and learn about the community.

PRESS CONTACT:

YOUR NAME; YOUR PHONE NUMBER; YOUR EMAIL

[List all the people who can provide information]

##END##



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### **SAMPLE FLYER**

*Create a flyer that provides the following information:*

- *Who are you inviting?*
- *What are you inviting them for?*
- *When will the event take place*
- *Where will the event take place*
- *Why are you hosting the event?*

Sikh Gurdwara of SALDEF  
Invites

The Local Community

to support the educational awareness, interfaith dialogue, and place of worship experiences.

What: Sikh Gurdwara Open House

When: Sunday, August 29<sup>th</sup>

Where: 1400 Pennsylvania St, Washington DC, 20005

Why: To promote understanding and acceptance of our neighbors

## COMMON QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Where do Sikhs come from?
  - a. The Sikh faith originated in South Asia over 500 years ago and most Sikhs trace their roots to South Asia as well.
2. How many are in the US?
  - a. There are roughly 700,000 Sikhs in the US
3. How long have they been in the US?
  - a. Since the late 1800s
4. When was Sikhism established? By whom?
  - a. 15th Century by our first Guru (spiritual teacher), Guru Nanak
5. How many leaders (prophets) do you have? Who is the current leader?
  - a. 10 living gurus
  - b. The 'living' guru, embodied in the scripture -- Guru Granth Sahib -- with equal importance on the holy congregation (*guru panth*)
6. What is your holy book?
  - a. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji
  - b. Sikhs revere the Guru Granth Sahib as the living guru and treat it with the utmost care and respect
7. What are you singing?
  - a. Hymns that are written in the SGGS, that are written in poetic meter, called *raags* (Indian classical music. The SGGS actually even has unique *raags* specific just to this scripture, created by the gurus)
8. What are your core beliefs?
  - a. Monotheism and equality.
9. What are your core principles?
  - a. Remember God, live a honest and hard working life, and do community service and share what you have with others
10. What is the name of God?
  - a. We do not believe that the Divine has any special or particular name, gender, or identifying factors. However, in our scriptures, we refer to the divine with a few different names, the most common being *Waheguru*
11. What are you bowing to? Why?
  - a. When a Sikh bows to the Guru Granth Sahib, it is in full quest of the divine word in the SGGS. By bowing, we are offering all the ignorance that is in our own heads to be erased, and replaced with the divinity written in the scripture.
12. Who is the priest? Who can be a priest? Who is the person leading the service? Who can lead the service?
  - a. Sikhs do not have a clergy like other faiths.

- b. We have a *granthi* -- one who is learned in the Guru Granth Sahib and provides explanations and discourse -- and *raagis* -- who are singers trained in classical singing to sing the hymns contained within the Guru Granth Sahib
13. What is the *Nishan Sahib*?
- a. It is a triangular saffron flag that marks all Gurdwaras
  - b. it is the symbol of our eternal spiritual and political sovereignty. For Sikhs, the *Nishaan Sahib* is a symbol of temporal power that rests within the holy community (*guru panth*).
14. Why does everyone sit on the floor? Why don't you have chairs or pews?
- a. Sikhism firmly believes in equality. On the floor, everyone is at the same level, no matter who they are.
  - b. Now most gurdwaras do accommodate chairs for those who are unable to sit on the floor because of physical disability or age.
15. What is the pudding given at the end of the service? What is it made of?
- a. the pudding is what we call *karah parsad*. It is given to Sikhs after a service as symbol of acceptance of the divine will that was read from the scripture. Not everyone is required to take it, and you are entitled to respectfully decline.
  - b. it is made of butter, sugar and flour.
16. Why don't some members of the community keep their hair or all the symbols?
- a. Just like any other faith, individuals practice and follow tenets of the faith that they are comfortable with. Sikhism and its followers are like any other faith, so for some their relationship with their hair is vital, and for others, they have not reached that level of commitment yet.
17. Why don't women wear turbans? Why do they have long hair?
- a. Some women do indeed wear turbans, it is a personal choice. All practicing Sikhs have unshorn hair, regardless of gender.
18. What does "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" mean?
- a. It is a greeting. "The Khalsa (pure) belong to God, Victory too belongs to God."
19. What does "Bole So Nihal. Sat Sri Akal" mean?
- a. Bole So Nihal- Whoever so utters, shall be fulfilled with happiness
  - b. Sat Sri Akal- The Divine is the ultimate truth.
20. Who can sing the hymns? Who can read the scripture?
- a. Anyone may read the Guru Granth Sahib or sing hymns from it..
21. Do you believe in proselytization? Are conversions allowed?
- a. No. One's choice of faith is a personal choice as Sikhs respect all religions.
22. What is the *Vaak/Hukam*? How do you pick the passage to read? Do you select it beforehand and prepare a sermon based on it?
- a. It is the message of the day for the listener to contemplate. It is picked at random, and read to the congregation. Sermons are not based upon it.
23. Why do you cover your head?
- a. Sikhs cover their head out of respect to their Guru.
24. What is the symbol with the double edge sword and crossed swords (the khanda)?
- a. The Khanda. It is a symbol of truth and justice.
25. Why do you have pictures of people getting tortured? Shaheedan photos?

- a. Those are people in our history who have been killed because they stood for civil rights. For example, in history, it was a crime to practice Sikhism and people would suffer torture instead of giving up their religion. Others sacrificed themselves so that others could practice their own religion.
  - b. This is a constant reminder and inspiration for Sikhs to see the sacrifices our ancestors made for the faith that they loved.
26. Are Sikhs a martial or violent people?
- a. No, Sikhs believe in peace. However, they will defend fundamental human rights of all peoples when they are attacked when all peaceful means have failed. But they will sacrifice themselves first before having to harm another innocent person.
27. Do you have a holy day or day of worship?
- a. No. In America, many people come together on Sunday because it is convenient during the work week. People come to gurdwara at any time they want to pay their respects or pray.
28. When is the gurdwara open?
- a. Each gurdwara will have its own unique schedule, with some being open 24 hours and other less time or only during services..
  - b. Gurdwaras are technically supposed to serve as a place of assistance for anyone at any time of day. But due to economic restrictions and the size of the local population it is often difficult to do so.
29. Do you have to be Sikh to come to the gurdwara?
- a. No. Services and langar are open to all regardless of background. Anyone may come and meditate in the diwan hall.

## Guide to the Gurdwara

### Welcome to the *Gurdwara*!

The Sikh congregational place of worship is called *gurdwara*. The literal translation of the term *gurdwara* is “the Guru’s door,” but it also means “by means of the Guru’s grace.” The prerequisites for entering a *gurdwara* are removing one’s shoes and covering one’s head with either a *ramaal* (handkerchief), scarf or some other cloth.

### We hope you enjoy your visit to the *gurdwara*!

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and founder of the Sikh religion, established the first *gurdwara* in the early 1500s. The Sikh Gurus established *gurdwaras* as places where *sangat* (congregation) could come together to worship as a community by reciting and reflecting upon hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurdwaras* are not only a religious institution for the Sikhs where they can learn about their religion and pray, but it is also a political institution where Sikhs can discuss important social, local and global issues.

Sikh *gurdwaras* across the world run a free community kitchen called *langar*, where a communal meal is served and eaten together by everyone visiting a *Gurdwara*. One of the earliest institutions of the Sikh faith, *langar* exemplifies an important Sikh teaching: all human beings are equal regardless of their socioeconomic status, race or religion. It was mandatory for all visitors to partake in *langar* before having an audience with the Guru, so that kings and paupers alike, would sit together and eat the same meal.

### *Gurdwara* Protocol

- Wear modest attire
- Remove shoes when entering the congregation hall. This is a sign of respect to the sovereignty of the Guru Granth Sahib. All *gurdwaras* have shoe racks.
- Cover your head at all times as a sign of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib.
- You will see Sikhs bow in front of the Guru Granth Sahib upon joining the congregation. Non-Sikhs are not required to bow, but should enter and quietly join the congregation.
- Most attendees will sit on the floor during the services, barring any medical or physical impairment. Men and women are often seated separately in many *gurdwaras*, however, this is not required religiously.
- Stand up during *Ardaas* (supplication prayer to God)
- Sit on the floor during *langar* and keep head cover
- No alcohol, tobacco, or smoking on the *gurdwara* premises.

### Chronological Outline of a Typical Day at the *Gurdwara*

- *Prakash*- A short ceremony performed when the Guru Granth Sahib is formally opened each day
- *Nitnem*- Daily prayers
- *Keertan*- Hymns and religious sermons that are often sung

- *Ardaas*- Prayer to God: everyone stands facing the Guru Granth Sahib, this prayer is said on several occasions.
- *Hukam*- A randomly selected passage from the Guru Granth Sahib, which serves as the reflection/order of the day for the community
- Community announcements and discussion, if any.
- *Langar*- sharing a communal meal from the community kitchen
- *Nitnem*- evening prayers
- *SukhAasan*- A ceremony to formally close the Guru Granth Sahib that signal the end of the services.

### **Terms and Traditions**

- *Chaur*- A flowing wisk that is respectfully waved over the *Guru Granth Sahib* to indicate its sovereignty.
- *Diwan Hall* – this is the main hall in the *gurdwara* in which the religious services are held, with the *Guru Granth Sahib* placed at the front.
- *Giani*- Someone learned in the Sikh religion (like a Rabbi)
- *Granthi*- (loosely) Minister/Caretaker. A *Granthi*'s primary duties include arranging daily services, reading, teaching and explaining the Sikh scripture. More generally, a *Granthi* is responsible for the care of the *gurdwara*, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and also to teach and advise community members.
- *Gurbani*- the contents of the Sikh scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib* containing the revealed wisdom of the Sikh *Gurus*, in their own words.
- *Guru*-Divinely inspired spiritual prophet-teacher, most commonly referring to one of the ten founders of the Sikh faith and the Guru Granth Sahib. Can also be used to refer to *the Waheguru* (God).
- *Guru Granth Sahib*- The Sikh scripture, written mostly in the form of hymns and poetry, it includes the writings of six of the Sikh *Gurus* as well as the devotional writings of 36 other saints, both Muslim and Hindu. It serves as the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge and authority of all the *Gurus*, and is treated with the utmost reverence by Sikhs.
- *Karah Prashad*- a dish of scard pudding prepared and served at all religious ceremonies conducted in the presence of the Guru Granth. It is served after the reading of the Hukam. By accepting the karah parshad, Sikhs symbolically accept the hukam as the sweet blessing of their Guru and agree to take it to heart.
- *Tabla & Harmonium*- Musical instruments, a set of small drums and a piano-like instrument respectively, used to perform *Keertan*.
- *Waheguru*- The name for God most commonly used by Sikhs Meditating on the name of God is paramount to Sikhs, and the name *Waheguru* is considered by Sikhs to be the culmination of all aspects of God.
- *Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh*-Literally meaning “The Khalsa belongs to Waheguru (God), Victory belongs to Waheguru (God).” This is the traditional Sikh greeting. It is said before the beginning of and at the conclusion of programs at the *gurdwara*.

## ARDAAS - Prayer of Supplication

There is One God, all victory is His.

May His sword be our protection. This is the Ballad of the Supreme Sword of the Divine  
Composed by the Tenth Master:

After first worshipping the Adi Shakti, the Primal Power, meditate on Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, then Guru Amar Das and Ram Das, may they grant us their protection.

Worship Guru Arjun, then Guru Hargobind and Siri Har Rai.

Meditate on Sri Har Krishan, upon seeing whom all sufferings shall depart.

Meditate on Guru Teg Bahadur and the nine treasures shall come running to you.

Great, great is Guru Gobind Singh, the Great King, Protector of the Faith, Master of the unity.  
May he protect us everywhere.

The Light of the ten Gurus, the living Guru, the Word of God and Truth of truths, Siri Guru Granth Sahib, by meditating on its words, all sufferings vanish. Meditate, O pure ones, and utter – Waheguru! (*Wondrous God, the Supreme Being*)

The four sons of the Tenth Master, the five beloved one, the forty liberated ones, the four holy thrones, all the dwelling places of the Guru. Meditate, O pure ones, and utter – Waheguru!

Those who were true to the Guru, who meditated on the Naam, who shared their earnings, who sacrificed for righteousness, and who saw the faults of others yet overlooked them. Think of their deeds, O pure ones, and utter – Waheguru!

Those who were broken by the wheel, cut up limb by limb, who gave their scalps but not their hair, and those ladies who sacrificed for Truth, who gave their dear children and suffered through hunger and pain at the hands of the enemy, but never gave up their faith and determination to live according to the Sikh Dharma, with all their hair, to the last breath. Meditate, O pure ones, and utter – Waheguru!

Now let the whole Khalsa offer its prayer. Let the first prayer of the Khalsa be – Waheguru, Waheguru, Waheguru!

As we think of God's Name, so may we be blessed.

May God's grace and protection extend to all bodies of the Khalsa wherever we may be.

May the Lord's glory be fulfilled and His will prevail.

May we receive victory from the sword of righteousness and the charity of our brotherhood.

May the Holy Sword of God assist us.

May the pure ones prevail.

May the realm of justice come.

May we unite in love.

May we be humble, but let our wisdom be exalted in the keeping of the Lord. O pure ones, say the God is great – Waheguru!

Bless us to ever live in the Righteousness of the true disciples. Give us the life of the living principle of the Guru's discipline. Grant us the gift of reading and understanding the Guru's divine Word.

Grant us faith, insight, trust in Thee, and the blessing of blessings, the Name, and the sight of and dip in the nectar tank of the Siri Harimandir Sahib, the Golden Temple.

May our choirs, banners and mansions abide forever and ever.

May our flags, seats of religious authority, forts, houses, ashrams and Gurdwaras prevail through all times. Then call on God, O pure ones, and utter – Waheguru!

Save us, O Lord, from the five obstacles of lust, anger, greed, pride and attachment, and keep us always attached to Thy lotus feet.

O honor of the honorless, Home of the homeless, Strength of the weak, Hope of the hopeless, O True Guru, Shelter of the Poor, We stand before Thee and offer our prayer:

(Open prayer)

(Please bless this Guru's Prashad (and Guru ka Langar) )

Forgive any omissions or transgressions in this Ardaas.

Bless Humanity and bring peace for the earth.

Let us be in the company of men and women of love, that we may remember Thy Name in their presence.

Through Nanak, may Thy Name forever increase, and the spirit be exalted, and may all prosper by Thy grace.

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ, ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, Teray Bhaanay Sarbat Daa Bhalaa!

The pure ones belong to God! All Victory belongs to God!

Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa! Waheguru Ji ki Fateh!