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• Religion

UM plans Christmas, Kwanzaa celebrations

By Jodi Sokolowski
Maine Campus staff

People across campus are gearing up to celebrate the holiday season and many incorporate religion into that celebration.

Some religious services are being adapted around the university's schedule in hope that students can find time to maintain their faith in God or take time for reflection in their busy lifestyles, said Rev. Dana Reed of the Protestant-based Wilson Center.

The Wilson Center, which welcomes all faiths, celebrated the four weeks of Advent, which are hope, love, joy and peace, yesterday. Advent is a celebration before Christmas to remind Christians of the reasons for recognizing Christmas.

Advent prayers will take place Thursday, Dec. 11, at 12:15 p.m. in the Lown room of the Memorial Union. This event is an ecumenical venture between the Wilson and Newman centers, Reed said.

A final worship will occur Dec. 14, at the Wilson Center. At 6 p.m. a Potluck dinner will be served followed by a 7 p.m. festival of

lessons and carols by candlelight.

"I think if I were a student, (Christmas) would be more special at that time of year in a church," Reed said.

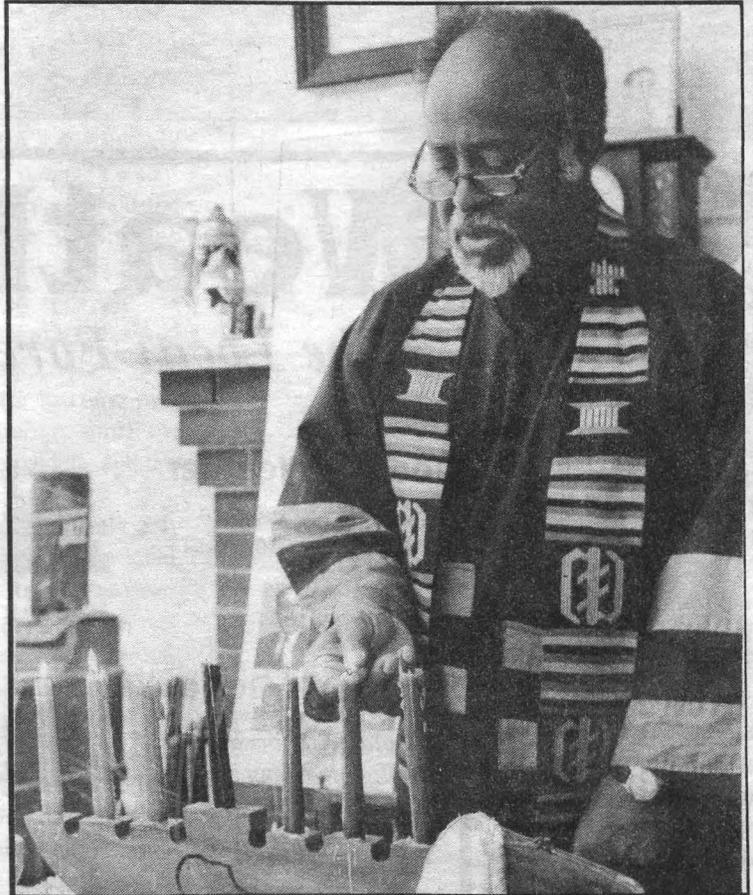
The Newman Center, a Roman-Catholic community center, is also hosting an Advent observation. For the next two Tuesdays, Dec. 9 and 16 at 7:30 p.m., the center will hold an Advent reflection of song and prayer. After the 10:30 a.m. mass on Dec. 21, a special Christmas festival will occur at the center.

"It's a special time for the community to get together to decorate the community center with Christmas decorations, and for the children to learn some Christmas songs," Father Joe Koury said.

Fellowship and refreshments are provided after masses, he said. A Christmas Eve mass will be offered at 7 p.m. at St. Mary's Church in Orono and a Christmas morning mass will be held at 9:30 in the Newman Center.

Also planned are a 7 p.m. mass for New Year's Eve at St. Mary's and a morning mass at 9:30 for New Year's Day at the Newman Center.

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James Varner, president of the Bangor area NAACP, lights the Kinara to celebrate Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday celebration. Various campus religious organizations, ranging from the Wilson Center to the Pagan Campus Organization will hold festive events. (Caleb Raynor photo.)

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The Pagan Campus Organization, a newly formed student group, will be sponsoring an event on campus to celebrate Yule, which occurs on the winter solstice. Yule is a time to celebrate the birth of spring since the days will begin to become longer with more daylight, said Daniel Look, a member of PaCO.

To celebrate, a bonfire will be lit Saturday night at Bumstock field starting at 8 p.m. People are encouraged to bring something, such as a problem written on a piece of paper, with them if they want to get away from a burden in life, said Eric Chapman, treasurer/secretary of PaCO.

"Yule is the beginning of a new cycle," he said.

Hot chocolate will be served to guests while Celtic music is played and various folklore is read, said Look.

There will also be a time for questions and answers about the group and pagan beliefs.

According to Look, the group has long-term intentions to provide a place for awareness and to learn more about other religions, not just paganism. They meet every Tuesday at 4 p.m. in the Union and can be found on FirstClass.

A presentation for Kwanzaa will be given Sunday, Dec. 21, at 7 p.m. in the Memorial Union. Kwanzaa is Swahili for "First Fruit", which is the celebration of harvest-

ing the first crops in Africa.

The holiday was designed to unify the family and encourage black people to study themselves and their culture, said James Varner, advisor of UMaine's Black Student Union and president of Bangor's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Kwanzaa is celebrated by more than 10 million people, including whites, Varner said. The festival lasts seven days from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. The Kinara, a candle-holder which holds seven candles, represents seven principles—one for each day of the week: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, co-operative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. The middle candle is black, which symbolizes the people in Africa; the three red symbolize the blood they have shed; and the other three green represent Mother Africa soil.

"They are there to communicate African values, to build a community and the family and to bring us together," Varner said.

On the first day of Kwanzaa, Varner will host two programs, at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m., at the Bangor Mall.

"Kwanzaa is an idea, philosophy, that says to black people that you are important, you are somebody," said Varner, "and to all people of the world that you are a human being."