

Finding Light in Darkness

Dear Vanderbilt community,

As the semester closes and we approach the winter holiday season, many people will spend time with family and friends. I'm glad for those of you who are headed toward the warmth and joy of celebrations and gatherings with loved ones. But I'm also aware of those in our community for whom this time is not a celebration, those who cannot gather with family and friends during this season—those whose loved ones have died, those who are far from home, those whose family have excluded them because of their identity, those whose loved ones are sick or in prison. For those individuals, this season is not a time of celebration and gathering, but simply a reminder of loss, hurt, pain and grief. It is a time of darkness.

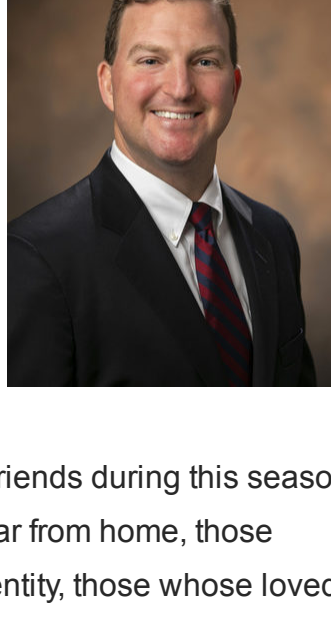
But this is a dark time of year in many ways. The days are short and the nights are long. Today, December 21, is the Winter Solstice, literally the longest night of the year. The natural world is in hibernation, trees and plants bare and the skies cloudy and gray. From Hanukkah to Alban Arthan to Christmas to Diwali to St. Lucia Day to Soyal, many faith traditions recognize how oppressive the darkness can be.

A couple of weeks ago, my daughter and I were able to attend Vanderbilt Chabad's on-campus Hanukkah observance. We were gathered on the Library Lawn as the evening grew darker and darker. Students bustled back and forth, changing classes, heading to dinner, going about their daily lives on that chilly, gray, dark evening. But we had paused with our Jewish friends because we had something important to say. We ate latkes and spun the dreidel. We laughed and sang and danced. But most importantly, we lit the menorah. By showing that light shines even in darkness, we proclaimed to our community that loneliness, grief and fear do not have the last word. We declared that even in the darkest moments, even when all seems lost, community, joy, hope and love are at work.

It is my hope that you see and feel that light at Vanderbilt, not just in this season of darkness, but always.

Wishing you joy and light,

Rev. Dr. Christopher Donald
University Chaplain and Director of the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life



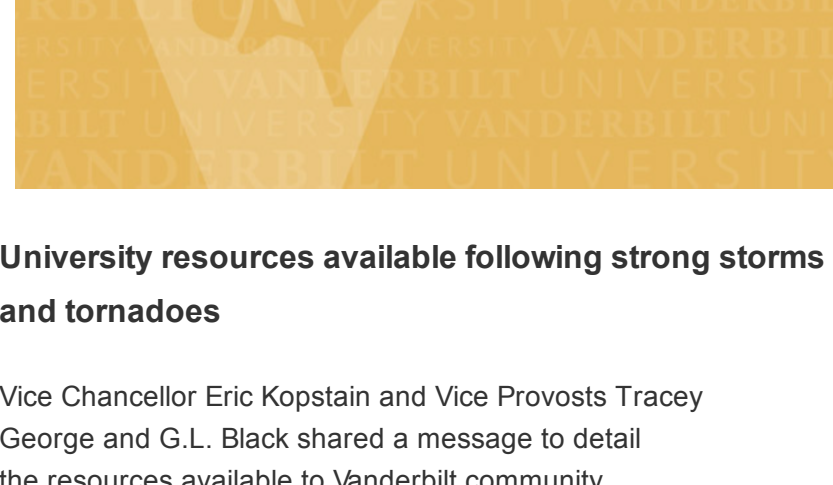
Join Vanderbilt and the surrounding Nashville community at annual MLK Commemorative Events

This year's lineup includes the Commemorative Series Kickoff, Joint Day of Service for students, walking teach-in and keynote address with poet and author Nikki Finney. Most events open to all Vanderbilt and surrounding community members. [View the lineup +](#)



Vice Chancellor Churchwell and his brothers discuss growing up in Nashville in "Home Fires"

Vice Chancellor Churchwell and his brothers, Drs. Keith and Kevin Churchwell, discuss growing up in Nashville, their college experiences and how family shaped them to become the people they are today. Be sure to read "Home Fires," featured in Vanderbilt Magazine. [Read More +](#)

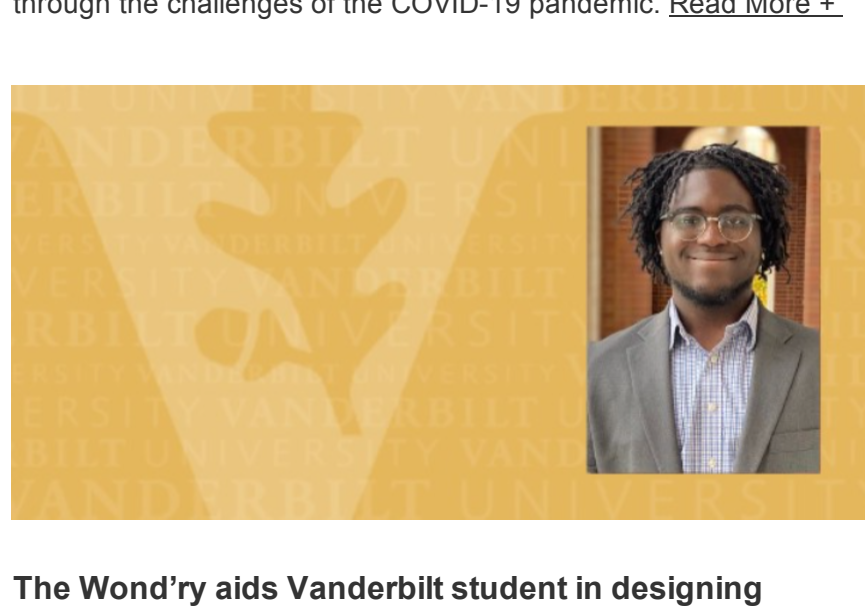


University resources available following strong storms and tornadoes

Vice Chancellor Eric Kopstain and Vice Provosts Tracey George and G.L. Black shared a message to detail the resources available to Vanderbilt community members following the strong storms and tornadoes that moved through the region over the weekend. [Read More +](#)

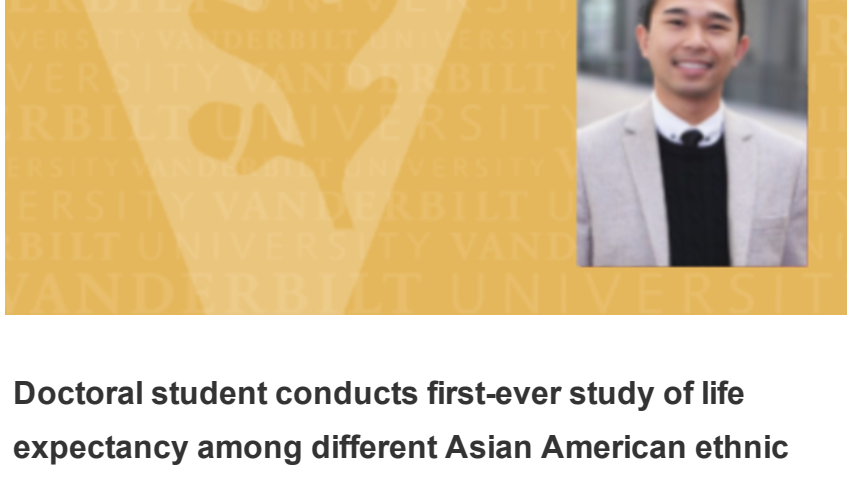
FutureVU FY2021 Progress Report

Vanderbilt University made significant strides during fiscal year 2021 in sustainable building and landscape projects, accessibility improvements and transportation and mobility initiatives, even through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Read More +](#)



The Wond'ry aids Vanderbilt student in designing African language learning app to connect with native roots

With help from the Wond'ry, Vanderbilt students and peers have designed an African language learning app to connect with their native roots. [Read More +](#)



Doctoral student conducts first-ever study of life expectancy among different Asian American ethnic groups

Darwin Baluran, a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology, sought to investigate the intermixture of ethnicities included under the "Asian" racial category—one of the nation's fastest-growing groups—and the health of these groups in the United States. [Read More +](#)



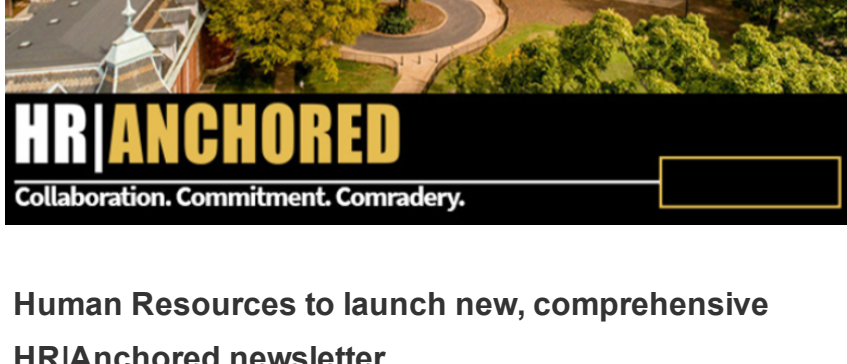
Vanderbilt, Loyola Honor Shared History

To recognize the special relationship between Pearl, Loyola and Vanderbilt, Commodore men's basketball coach Jerry Stackhouse, Loyola head coach Drew Valentine, Vanderbilt Athletic Director Candice Lee and a group of Pearl High alumni took part in a pregame commemoration at center court. [Read More +](#)



The pioneer behind Shea Ralph: A mother and daughter's basketball journey tells the story of a new era of equality

Years before Vanderbilt basketball head coach Shea Ralph's generation helped set a standard for women who aspire and act to change the world through sports, her mother, Marsha Lake, traveled to the Soviet Union as part of a team that represented the United States on the world stage for the first time in the Title IX era. [Read More +](#)



Human Resources to launch new, comprehensive HR|Anchored newsletter

Human Resources announces HR|Anchored, a new monthly newsletter. The Human Resources team has thoughtfully designed the newsletter to keep faculty and staff informed about all things HR. [Read More +](#)

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[HR offers resources for navigating well-being during the holidays](#)

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