HISTORY AND MEANING
Hanukkah is also known as the Festival of Lights and the Feast of Dedication. It is an eight-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem following a Jewish victory in 165 BCE. The Temple had been seized by Assyrian soldiers, and, when it was restored into Jewish hands, a redemptive ritual of burning oil in the Temple’s menorah was planned. There was only one day’s worth of oil in the Temple, but the menorah was lit, and, miraculously, the oil lasted for the entire eight days of purification.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY
• Special foods may be shared during this time.
• Communication is key. Ask how you can support observances.
• Students are not automatically excused from class for this holiday. Graduate and professional students must refer to their own school and departmental vacation policies and calendar for more specific information.
• Staff members may request paid time off to celebrate. Support their preference to take leave for their religious observance.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES
• Observers light candles in a special nine-candle menorah, starting with one candle on the first night of the holiday, and adding an additional candle each night of the holiday. One distinctive candle, called the “shammus” after it is lit, is used to light the other candle(s).
• Children often play with a dreidel, a four-sided spinning top.
• Eating foods cooked in oil, such as doughnuts and potato latkes (pancakes fried in oil), is a traditional activity. Oil-cooked foods are eaten because the miracle happened with oil.

RESOURCES FOR MANAGING WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH
People feel many types of emotions during the holidays—joy, peace, stress and depression, to name a few. Whatever you feel, know you are not alone, and Vanderbilt has resources to help you through these challenges.

Faculty, Staff and Postdocs
Work/Life Connections-EAP
(615) 936-1327
vumc.org/health-wellness/work-life

Students
Office of Student Care Coordination
(615) 343-9355
vanderbilt.edu/carecoordination

This resource is part of a toolkit created by Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to highlight religious and cultural observances that members of our community may practice. This toolkit is not meant to be exhaustive, but instead to provide a general overview of how we can support staff, faculty and students. We continually refine this information and welcome your suggestions.

For more information or to provide feedback, contact Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at edi@vanderbilt.edu. For information on the university’s policy on religious holy days and observances, contact the Office of the University Chaplain and Religious Life at religiouslife@vanderbilt.edu or Human Resources at human.resources@vanderbilt.edu.