Kwanzaa

In support of Vanderbilt staff, students, faculty and postdocs, this information is offered as a resource about the observance of Kwanzaa.

HISTORY AND MEANING

Kwanzaa is a unique African American celebration focusing on the traditional African values of family, community, responsibility, commerce and self-improvement. Kwanzaa is neither political nor religious, and, despite some misconceptions, it is not a substitute for Christmas. It is a time of reaffirming African American people, their ancestors and their culture. Kwanzaa was first celebrated in 1965. Kwanzaa celebrates Nguzo Saba, or the Seven Principles of African heritage. These principles are:

• Umoja (unity)
• Kujichagulia (self-determination)
• Ujima (collective work and responsibility)
• Ujamaa (cooperative economics)
• Nia (purpose)
• Kuumba (creativity)
• Imani (faith)

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY

• Be aware of Kwanzaa as a cultural celebration for African American employees.
• Communication is key. Ask how you can support observances.
• Because Kwanzaa focuses on community, staff members may be encouraged to celebrate African American culture with their work community, e.g., sharing of food, cultural stories, etc.
• 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.
• Because Kwanzaa and the winter break holidays overlap, scheduling employees' time off will need attention.
• Staff members may request paid time off to celebrate.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES

- Symbols include corn or other crops, a candleholder (kinara) with seven candles, a communal cup for pouring libation, gifts, a poster of the seven principles, and a black, red and green flag, which may be placed on a decorative mat.
- Kwanzaa celebrations may include drumming, music, art, colorful African cloth, and fresh fruit representing African idealism.

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

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.