Great Lent

In support of our staff, students, faculty and postdocs, this information is offered as a resource about the Christian observance of Great Lent.

MARCH 11, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING

Great Lent is celebrated by Orthodox Christians. Orthodox Christians and Western Christians share the belief that Jesus is believed to be the Savior, the Son of God. Ash Wednesday commemorates the period of time leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This period of time is called a great period of Lent, or “Great Lent.” It is a time of fasting and repentance in remembrance of the account of Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the desert. People will enter into a time of contemplation, which can include a conscious review of spiritual life and journey. Each week of Great Lent has a particular meaning, including the return of the icons to the churches (week one), commemoration of the life of St. Gregory Palamas (week two), adoration of the cross (week three), commemoration of St. John Climacus (week four) and commemoration of the life of St. Mary of Egypt (week five). Palm Sunday commemorates the return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, followed by Holy Week, in which Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Most Orthodox Christian churches do not celebrate Ash Wednesday unless they have adopted the Western rite.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES

• Personal reflection is important during this time. Attendance at services for each week of Great Lent is important.
• People may fast or make a personal sacrifice, e.g., abstain from caffeine or sugar.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY

• Be aware that many people may fast or give up certain foods or activities during Great Lent. This may not be a good time for large celebrations centered on food.
• Some Orthodox Christians may observe Ash Wednesday.
• While students are not automatically excused from class for this observance, they may work with their faculty members to make accommodations, such as considerations for students who may be fasting. Graduate and professional students must refer to their own school and departmental vacation policies and calendars for more specific information.
• Staff members may request paid time off for this observance. Support their preference to take leave for their religious observance.

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

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