Fast of Esther

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

MARCH 20, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING
This Jewish holiday is a dawn-to-nightfall fast held the day before Purim. It commemorates the fasting Jewish people undertook during their exile in the Persian Empire, the events of which are recorded in the Book of Esther. Multiple events in this exile involve fasting, including Esther’s three day fast before she faced King Ahasuerus, and a victorious battle with Persian armies during a fast. If Purim is on a Sunday in a given year, the Fast of Esther is held on the preceding Thursday to avoid conflicting with Shabbat. The observance of this fast is generally less strict than others, especially for pregnant or nursing mothers and other needful people.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES
• Those observing this holiday will be fasting during the day.
• Changes are made to the normal prayer regimen.
• It is traditional to give “half” denomination coins (typically half-dollars in the U.S.) to charity to commemorate the donations given by Jewish people to build the Tabernacle and provide its sacrifices.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY
• 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

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.