Beltane

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

MAY 1, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING

Beltane is a pagan festival that represents the peak of spring and the beginning of summer, when observers believe the Earth’s energy is at its strongest, bursting with fertility. Beltane has Gaelic roots—it was historically observed throughout Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Cattle were drawn out to their pastures and rituals were performed to protect the livestock, crops and people, as well as to encourage growth for the summer season. During Beltane, which is similar to Samhain, the Gaelic festival during the transition from autumn to winter, celebrants believe the veil between the human and supernatural worlds is at its thinnest, making it a crucial time for spiritual communication. Beltane (meaning “fires of Bel”—Bel is the god of heaven and earth) is a fire festival that celebrates the fertility of the coming year. Fire represents love and passion, while flowers (pollen) represent fertility.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES

- Devotees perform a ritual for the uniting of the Lord (Green Man) and Lady (May Queen).
- The holiday is celebrated by lighting fires (believed to cleanse, purify and increase fertility), dancing, feasting and performing fertility rites, such as dancing around a maypole that is painted and decorated with flowers. Celebrants hold long ribbons that are attached to the top of the maypole.
- Traditional Beltane treats include oat and barley cakes, lavender lemonade, cinnamon scones and rose flavored items

Photo credit: iStock.com/theasis

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL OBSERVANCES
RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL OBSERVANCES

Beltane

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY

- Ask community members in observance how they celebrate and how they can be supported and encouraged.
- While students are not automatically excused from class for this observance, they may work with their course instructors to make accommodations. 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, students and postdocs. 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 and Religious Life at religiouslife@vanderbilt.edu or Human Resources at human.resources@vanderbilt.edu.