Greek Easter

In support of our staff, students, faculty and postdocs, this information is offered as a resource about the Eastern Orthodox Christian observance of Easter, sometimes referred to as Greek Easter.

APRIL 28, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Easter is regarded as the most important holiday of the year. It follows the 40-day fast of Great Lent. Easter celebrates the most significant event in Christian history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Pentecost follows the 50-day season of Easter. According to Christian belief, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection become a path to his ascension, which is a process of transforming death into new life. For Christians, the resurrection is a factual reality, and this reality becomes an ongoing transformation in one’s spiritual life and experiences.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES

• During the preceding Holy Week, churches hold services every night.
• There is a procession for the funeral of Jesus on Good Friday, a somber event that ends the Passion plays.
• Just before midnight on the Saturday following Good Friday, people go to a special church service. At midnight, the church goes dark, and then chants of “Christ is risen” begin. People then light their Easter candles using the priest’s flame, obtained from the Eternal Flame at Christ’s tomb in Jerusalem.
• The Lenten fast is traditionally broken with magiritsa, a soup made from lamb offal, once worshippers get home from Easter service. The following morning through the evening is a large and merry feast which includes many of the foods forbidden during Lent. The main course is roast lamb, which is symbolic of Jesus, the Lamb of God.
• Other traditional Easter foods include eggs and sweet bread. Eggs are boiled and dyed red, symbolizing the blood of Christ. A traditional sweet bread called tsoureki is baked, containing multiple ingredients that were forbidden during Lent. It consists of three pieces of interwoven dough and has red eggs baked inside.
• People play a game in which they crack their Easter eggs together, and the loser is the one whose egg breaks. The person whose egg is left unbroken at the end of the game will have good luck in the coming year.
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TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY

- Ask community members in observance 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/

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.

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.