RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL OBSERVANCES

Holy Week

In support of our staff, students, faculty and postdocs, this information is offered as a resource about the Christian observance of Holy Week, which includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter.

APRIL 14-20, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING

For Western and Eastern Christian traditions, Holy Week includes Palm Sunday, the day of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as Savior; Good Friday, the day that Jesus was tried and crucified, or executed, on a wooden cross; and Easter, the day that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. Jesus is believed to be the savior, the Son of God.

On Maundy Thursday, Christians recall the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, along with Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples and Jesus’ new commandment “that you love one another” (John 13:34). On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified and died on the cross. This is why the cross is such an important symbol for Christians. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). Good Friday is a day set aside for reflection and thanksgiving for the unconditional faithfulness and love of God. Veneration of the cross is customary in churches on Good Friday.

Easter celebrates the most significant event in Christian history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It commences a 50-day celebration until Pentecost. According to Christian belief, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection become a path to his ascension, which is a process of death into new life. For Christians, the resurrection is a factual reality, and this reality becomes an ongoing transformation in one’s spiritual life. Each person experiences death in relationships, events, in the seasons, etc. Within these experiences, there is renewal and new life.

This week symbolizes the spiritual journey, which includes times of celebration, loss and dying, and redemption or hope. It is a symbol of God’s love, which overcomes death. This process is referred to as the Paschal Mystery. The dates of Holy Week differ between the Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

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.

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**Holy Week**

**TYPICAL OBSERVANCES**

- There are church services and sacred readings during this week. On Maundy Thursday, there is a somber remembrance of Jesus’ Last Supper, his washing of the disciples’ feet and his new commandment to love one another. On Easter, there is often a sunrise service rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus.

- For Roman Catholics, no Mass is celebrated on Good Friday or Holy Saturday.

- There may be special family gatherings and meals that take place.

**TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY**

- Ask those in observance how they can be supported.

- 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.

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**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/

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