



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Inclusive Employer Guide

WHAT IS MAUNDY THURSDAY?

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is the Thursday before Easter, believed to be the day that Jesus held his final supper (Last Supper) with his disciples. Easter, celebrated on the Sunday, is an important festival and holiday of the Christian Church, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This year Holy Thursday will be observed on April 1 and Easter on April 4.

What does Maundy mean, and what does the day commemorate?

“Maundy” is derived from the Latin “mandatum,” which means “commandment.” It refers to when Jesus, during the Last Supper, said to the disciples: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34, Revised Standard Version)

At the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples in an act of humility, love, and servant leadership. He also introduced the Holy Eucharist – the eating of bread and drinking of wine to represent Christ’s body and blood, also known now as communion.

How is Maundy Thursday observed?

Many churches observe Maundy Thursday with an evening communion service and a foot-washing ceremony, to reflect on Jesus’ commandment to love and serve others. It is common practice for the altar of the church to be stripped bare.

In addition, some churches will observe some variation of the ancient service of Tenebrae, the Latin word for candles. It is a service of candles accompanied by various readings of scripture and the gradual extinguishing of candles, which cast shadows of the Cross in different dimensions on the walls. Eventually the congregation is left for a minute or two in total darkness, representing Jesus’ impending death.

Some churches offer a light supper for congregation members after the Maundy Thursday service, where donations for the meals are used for charitable causes.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1 Get educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Christian colleagues are aware of Maundy Thursday and how they can be supportive.
- 2 Intentional planning.** Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on the evening of Maundy Thursday if possible.
- 3 Be flexible.** Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to swap shifts to observe Maundy Thursday or other Easter celebrations. Look for solutions that suit all parties.
- 4 Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Christian colleagues will observe Maundy Thursday, or observe it in the same way.