



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

HOLY FRIDAY & ORTHODOX EASTER IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS HOLY FRIDAY AND ORTHODOX EASTER?

Orthodox Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection, also known as Pascha. Orthodox Christian tradition, which originated in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, celebrates Pascha in accordance with the Julian calendar, as opposed to Western churches which follow the Gregorian calendar. This is why Orthodox Easter falls on a different date to Easter Sunday. In 2023, Orthodox Holy Friday (Good Friday, focusing on Jesus' death) is observed on Friday, April 14, while Orthodox Easter falls on Sunday, April 16.

HOW ARE HOLY FRIDAY AND ORTHODOX EASTER OBSERVED?

Many Orthodox Christians attend church services during the Holy Week that leads up to Easter Sunday, especially on Holy Friday. For many Orthodox Christians, Holy Friday is a strict day of fasting, and some Orthodox churches may have a Good Friday liturgy in the afternoons or evenings. The Easter Sunday church liturgy is joyous as it celebrates Jesus Christ's resurrection, as told in the Christian bible.

The period before Easter, known as Lent, is also a time of strict fasting and self-reflection. Orthodox Christians in Canada observe this fasting ritual before celebrating Easter Sunday with a feast, where meat and dairy products can be eaten again. Another tradition observed in Orthodox Christian churches is the blessing of food baskets. The baskets are usually filled with bread, cheese, meat, eggs, butter, salt, and other types of food used for Paschal celebrations. Symbols of Orthodox Easter include hard boiled eggs, dyed red to reference the blood of Christ. Lamb is another important symbol. Jesus is thought to have sacrificed himself for the sins of others and is thus described by John the Apostle as the Lamb of God.

It is customary for Orthodox Christians to greet one another during the Easter season with the Paschal greeting. This begins with the phrase, "**Christ is Risen!**", and the response is "**Christ is Risen, indeed!**" The phrase "**Christos Anesti**" (Greek for "Christ is Risen") is also the title of a traditional Orthodox Easter hymn sung during Easter services in celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

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HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1 **Get educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Orthodox Christian colleagues are aware of Orthodox Easter and how they can be supportive.

2 **Intentional planning and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on Holy Friday if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to observe Holy Friday. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

3 **Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Orthodox Christian colleagues will observe Easter in the same way.