

# Easter

Easter is one of the most important holidays for Christians. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ following his crucifixion. In 2017, the season of Lent began for Western Christian observers with Ash Wednesday on March 1. For many observers Lent ends on Easter Sunday, which falls on April 16 and begins the Easter season, which runs until Pentecost on June 4. However, individual adherents may use different dates to mark the end of Lent, including Holy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter) or Palm Sunday (a week before Easter). It is important for employers to keep in mind that there may be variation in which dates their employees consider to be part of the Lenten or Easter seasons.

It is also important to remember that Easter, and the other holidays associated with Easter, usually fall on different dates for Western and Eastern Orthodox observers. This occurs, in part, because the West uses the Gregorian calendar and the Orthodox Church uses the Julian calendar. This tip sheet will use the dates observed in the West unless otherwise specified.

## **Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday takes place 40 days before Easter and is often commemorated by special church services. It can fall anywhere between February and March, so managers should therefore be alert and check its date each year. In 2017, Ash Wednesday fell on March 1. On Ash Wednesday many traditions and denominations—Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and others—hold special services where worshippers are marked on their foreheads with ashes in the shape of a cross. It is important for managers and coworkers to be respectful of this practice.

## **Lent**

Lent is the period of 40 days before Easter. Christians who observe seek to experience in their own lives Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. In 2017, Lent will begin on March 1. Many people decide to give up something of importance to them during this period.

## **Holy Thursday**

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, is the Thursday before Easter. It commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Holy Thursday is most commonly observed by Catholics, who may request a part or full day off from work in order to attend a special Holy Thursday Mass. In 2017, Holy Thursday falls on April 13.

## **Good Friday**

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the day Jesus Christ was executed by crucifixion. It is a day of mourning for many Christians, who often attend special Good Friday church services. In 2017, Good Friday falls on April 14. Observant employees may request a part or full day off from work.

## **Easter Sunday**

Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ following his crucifixion. While Lent is a time of sacrifice and remembrance, Easter is a holiday of celebration and joy. The date of Easter changes each year and typically differs between Western and Eastern Orthodox Churches. While Easter in the Orthodox Church usually falls later than Easter in the West, in 2017 Easter Sunday falls on April 16 for both Western Christian and Eastern Orthodox observers.

## **Dietary Restrictions & Fasting**

Lent can be marked by refraining from food, festivities, and daily activities (some people may for instance stop watching television or playing video games). Some Christians fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday while others give up a particular vice, such as a favorite snack food, to test self-discipline and symbolize Jesus' deprivation in the wilderness. As an alternative to "giving something up," some Christians add a Lenten discipline, such as feeding people at homeless shelters or otherwise challenging themselves to do something posi-

tive to make the world a better place, to their Lenten activities. If Christian employees are observing Lent, it is important to be aware of this when scheduling events where food may be present because they may have dietary restrictions that they do not observe at other times of the year.

### **Scheduling**

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday churches hold special services. Christian employees may request time off work to attend these services. Some employees also observe Easter Monday and may request time off for this observance. Invite your employees to share how they personally observe Easter and what practices they have that should be respected during the 40 days of Lent.

**For more useful information on Christianity and other world religions, subscribe to our online resource, Religion at Work: A (Human) Resource. To learn more, visit <https://tanenbaum.org/religion-at-work-resource/>**