



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

ORTHODOX EASTER

Inclusive Employer Guide

WHAT IS ORTHODOX EASTER?

Orthodox Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Orthodox use the word "Easter" in the west, but most often call the feast Pascha, the Greek form of the word "Passover". Orthodox Christian tradition, which originated in the Middle East, and 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 Western Easter. This year, Orthodox Holy Friday (Good Friday, focusing on Jesus' death), falls on April 30 while Orthodox Easter Sunday falls on May 2.

How is it observed?

Pascha is the most important feast in the church calendar of the Orthodox Church. As they do in the six weeks of Lent that precede Holy Week, many Orthodox Christians keep a strict fast until Pascha. Services following the account of the passion of Jesus Christ from the Bible are held throughout the week, culminating in the commemoration of the death and burial of Christ on Holy Friday, and his resting in the tomb on the Great and Holy Sabbath (Saturday). A vigil is maintained at the tomb until, at midnight, the Paschal services ring in the joy of the resurrection of Christ with great celebration.

Following the fast of Lent and Holy Week, Orthodox Christians in Canada celebrate Pascha 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, "Christ is risen!" (in Greek, "Christos anesti!"), with the response in return, "Indeed he is risen!" ("Alithos anesti!") The short hymn beginning "Christ is risen" is also sung repeatedly throughout the Paschal season.

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.** Be considerate when booking meetings or events in the time leading up to it, especially for Orthodox Holy Friday.
- 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 Orthodox Easter or associated events. Look for solutions that suit all parties.
- 4 Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Orthodox Christian colleagues will observe Easter in the same way.