

Guidance for staff during Lent and Easter

The word Lent stems from the old English word 'lengthen'. It is the period of 6 weeks, 40 days, not including Sundays, in the lead up to Easter and is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter.

Lent started on Ash Wednesday, February 14th, and ends on 28th April. The last week of Lent is known as 'Holy Week' and Easter Sunday takes place on 31st March.

The Story of Lent

Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray before beginning his work for God. Jesus was tempted several times by Satan but was able to resist.

By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days and they recall the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion.

How Christians observe Lent

Some Christians fast for the whole of Lent, and some maintain the practice on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. A common practice for Christians is to surrender a particular vice such as chocolate or smoking. Whatever the sacrifice, it is a reflection of Jesus' deprivation and a test of self-discipline.

During Lent there are many foods that some Christians historically do not eat. For example: meat, fish, fats, eggs, and milky foods. Therefore, people often have a feast the day before, known as **Shrove Tuesday**. This day is a celebratory feast before Lent begins.

The word Shrove comes from the ritual of shricing – something Christians used to undergo in the past. In shricing, a person confesses their sins and receives absolution for them. When someone receives absolution, they are forgiven for their sins and released from their guilt and pain.

Pancakes are often associated with this day, as it is a dish that uses up eggs, fats and milk.

Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is a day of penitence to clean the soul before the Lent fast. Many Churches hold special services where worshippers are marked with ashes, as a sign of saying sorry to God for any wrongdoing. It is often observed with a service where palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burnt and the ash is used to make the sign of a cross on people's foreheads.

During **Lent**, Christians recall the separation between humans and God and their own rejection of God's goodness. As it is traditionally a period of lament and penitence, Churches will often remove flowers from their chapels and veil the cross in purple during this time. In some traditions, certain words such as hallelujah are not used in prayers.

Holy Week

The last week of Lent is known as Holy Week. It celebrates the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus and each day remembers a different event in the week: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Palm Sunday, known as Passion Sunday, takes place on 24th March and commemorated Jesus's procession into the city of Jerusalem. Some Christian traditions will hold processions with a donkey and palm leaves around their local area, stopping to read the verses of the Bible that tell the story of Palm Sunday.

On **Maundy Thursday** Jesus celebrated a Passover meal with his disciples, sometimes referred to as the Last Supper, and washed their feet as a symbol of his sacrifice that was to come with the crucifixion. Traditionally, many churches will hold feet washing ceremonies where a priest will wash your feet. It is also traditional to be blessed with oil on this day, as Jesus was blessed with oil at this Passover meal. This is also where Christians get the tradition of Eucharist, or Communion, where they share bread and wine to remember Jesus' death.

Good Friday is observe to remember the suffering and death of Jesus at Calvary, during the crucifixion.

Easter Sunday follows Good Friday and is when Christians commemorate the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion. This is a big celebration for Christians and represents rebirth or renewal through the sacrifice that Jesus made to restore the relationship between humans and God.

A recognisable feature of Easter is the Easter egg. An egg is a symbol of new life and in Christianity Easter eggs are used as a symbol for the resurrection of Jesus.

How to support colleagues during Lent

- Time off

People may want to take time off to attend services during Lent, in which case you should do their best to accommodate your staff that wish to do so.

- Fasting

The practice of fasting varies amongst traditions, but there are certain Christian traditions where people will fast food and water during the day. It is always best to take a person-centred approach and proactive approach with colleagues observing Lent.

Take the time out to discuss ways you may be able to support them. People may want to change their shift patterns or working hours so consider flexible start and finish times.

- Wind-downs

Asking a Christian colleague who is fasting during Lent to attend a lunch meeting or a Friday social (even if it is online) can demand a lot from them. It is best practice to be proactive in your communication and find out what support you colleagues may need so that they are not made to feel uncomfortable during their fast.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this guidance, and I look forward to working together with you on EDI at Homeless Link.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact pavan.nagra@homelesslink.org.uk