

## St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day is a Catholic religious observance. It commemorates the patron saint of Ireland, who is credited for bringing Christianity to the island in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, St. Patrick's Day has become a cultural observance, in addition to a religious one, and many Americans of Irish descent view the day as a celebration of their heritage. Each year, St. Patrick's Day and the Catholic Feast of St. Patrick is celebrated on **March 17<sup>th</sup>**, when the saint is believed to have died.

### **Background**

Born in Roman Britain in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, St. Patrick was captured and enslaved in Ireland as a teenager. After escaping back to Britain, he returned as a priest and later, a bishop, to bring Christianity to Ireland, establishing Christian monasteries, churches, and schools. St. Patrick became a legendary figure in the centuries following his death; tradition holds that he raised the dead, drove the snakes of Ireland into the sea, and used the three-leaved shamrock to teach about the Trinity.

In Ireland, St. Patrick's Day was traditionally a solemn day marked by religious services and feasts to commemorate the life and death of St. Patrick. However, Irish immigrants to the United States shaped the day into a more secular celebration – the version of the holiday that most Americans find familiar today. These celebrations became particularly large and important to Irish Americans in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Irish immigrants fleeing to the U.S. following the 1845 Irish potato famine found themselves faced with xenophobia and bigotry. In the decades following the 1840s, as xenophobia lessened and more people of Irish heritage assimilated into American culture, St. Patrick's Day became a widespread celebration enjoyed by those of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### **How is St. Patrick's Day Celebrated?**

In addition to religious observances, American cities which have traditionally had large Irish populations host St. Patrick's Day parades and celebrations – these cities include Boston, New York, and Chicago. In America, St. Patrick's Day is often associated with leprechauns, pots of gold, and all things green; common practices include parades with dance and music (especially bagpipes), eating corned beef and cabbage, wearing green clothes, and eating green foods. These most recognizable aspects of St. Patrick's celebrations in the U.S. were popularized during the rise of St. Patrick's Day to American cultural prominence, and they are not directly linked to the day's religious roots.

### **How Will St. Patrick's Day affect the Global Workplace?**

St. Patrick's Day is not a federal holiday in the United States. However, employers should keep in mind that some employees may wish to take the day off or leave work early to participate in celebrations. In addition, organizations with connections in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Newfoundland and Labrador should keep in mind that St. Patrick's Day is a public holiday in these areas, and workplaces may be closed.

St. Patrick's Day may also offer a good opportunity for interested workplaces to host social gatherings and celebrations related to the holiday. When planning events, however, it's important to avoid reaffirming stereotypes by being aware that many of the symbols and traditions associated with St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the U.S. are a result of American commercialization rather than a genuine reflection of Irish culture or Catholic faith. Finally, some employees may wish to avoid celebrating St. Patrick's Day because of its Christian roots, even though many celebrations of the holiday are more secular than religious.

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