

National News

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This year's Ramadhan coincides with the Lenten season, an overlap that happens roughly once every 32 years.

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Muslims and Christians in Uganda and across the globe have today begun observing the holy months of Ramadhan and Lent, ushering in a season of fasting, prayer and spiritual reflection.

In a rare occurrence, this year's Ramadhan coincides with the Christian Lenten season, an overlap that happens roughly once every 32 years. Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, Ramadhan shifts backward by about 11 days each year, completing a full cycle through the Gregorian calendar over three decades. Lent, which falls between early February and mid-March, occasionally aligns with it.

Ramadhan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is the holiest month in Islam as it commemorates the revelation of the Holy Koran to Prophet Muhammad. During this period, Muslims abstain from food, drink and sex from dawn to sunset as an act of devotion to Allah.

Speaking ahead of the commencement of Ramadhan at Kibuli Mosque yesterday, Sheikh Hafithu Walusimbi, the head of Sharia at the Kibuli-based Muslim group, urged believers to use the month to strengthen their faith and promote unity.

"Ramadhan is not only about abstaining from food and drink. It is a time for self-discipline, forgiveness, charity and drawing closer to Allah," he said.

He encouraged Muslims to observe *suhoor* (the pre-dawn meal) and break their fast at sunset in line with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Fasting, he noted, is one of the five pillars of Islam and a fundamental obligation for every able-bodied adult Muslim.

"By experiencing hunger and thirst, believers are reminded of the struggles faced by the poor, which encour-

Christians, Muslims begin fasting in rare convergence



Christ the King Parish Priest Msgr Gerald Majella Kalumba applies ash on the foreheads of Christians on Ash Wednesday in 2024. PHOTO/FILE

ages acts of charity," Sheikh Walusimbi added.

Sheikh Zayid Lubanga, the head of Sharia at the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, said charitable giving increases during Ramadhan, with Muslims encouraged to give *zakat* (obligatory alms) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity).

"Mosques and Muslim organisations often organise food distribution drives to assist families in need," he said.

He added that Ramadhan strengthens family and community bonds, as families gather for *iftar* meals and mosques host special nightly *Taraweeh*

prayers.

The holy month will culminate in Eid al-Fitr celebrations marked by prayers, feasting and generosity.

Meanwhile, Christians are marking Ash Wednesday, which ushers in the 40-day Lenten season leading to Easter. The period commemorates the 40 days Jesus Christ spent fasting in the wilderness and is regarded as one of the most sacred seasons in the Christian calendar.

During Ash Wednesday prayers, believers are marked with a cross on the forehead using ash as a sign of repent-

ance and human mortality.

Rev Fr Phillip Oddi, the executive secretary for social communications at the Uganda Episcopal Conference, said Lent is a time for spiritual renewal.

"Lent is about renewing our spiritual life, abandoning evil ways and embracing the values of the Gospel through love, forgiveness, charity and prayer," he said.

He explained that fasting during Lent goes beyond abstaining from food and should include personal sacrifice and helping the needy.

"What you save from your sacrifice

KEY FACTS

Ramadhan (Islam)

- Ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.
- Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset.
- Includes *suhoor* (pre-dawn meal) and *iftar* (breaking of fast).
- Emphasises prayer, charity (*Zakat* and *Sadaqah*), and self-discipline.
- Ends with Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

Lent

- 40-day season leading to Easter (excluding Sundays).
- Begins with Ash Wednesday.
- Marked by fasting, prayer, repentance and charity.
- Encourages personal sacrifice and spiritual renewal.
- Concludes with Easter celebrations.

should be used to help the poor. Fasting should inspire both spiritual growth and charity," he said, noting that many Christians give up habits such as alcohol, excessive entertainment or social media during the season.

In his Lenten message issued on February 5 from Vatican City, Pope Leo XIV urged Christians to place God at the centre of their lives and avoid harsh speech, slander and hurtful language.

Church of Uganda Provincial Secretary Rev Canon William Ongeng also called for responsible communication, especially online.

"Fasting can mean stepping away from gossip, false information and online hostility. Our communication should build, not divide," he said.