

Christ Church and Trinity Reformed Church Joint Statement on Holy Days

We believe that the people of God have been freed from all bondage to observing days, weeks, months, seasons or years (Gal. 4:9-11, Col. 2:16). Those Old Testament laws were shadows of Christ who has come (Col. 2:17). And when Christ died we died with Him, and when He was raised and ascended into heaven, we were raised and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Col. 3:1, Eph. 2). This means that together with Christ, the saints are the rulers of time and space. We have all been established in Him as lords of the Sabbath, to rule time according to the wisdom of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 4:6-7). We are not under days, but now the days are under us. And therefore we confess that all celebration of days is voluntary, freely offered, and no one may judge or be judged on this basis (Rom. 14:5-6, Col. 2:16).

It is in this spirit of freedom and victory that we gladly encourage the celebration of the historic church calendar as a glorious testimony of the victory and rule of Christ over time. Rightly understood, His life celebrated and remembered in our days and weeks and months is a continuation of the triumph of Christ over the principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them and triumphed over them, and our memorials in time are meant to continue to walk in Him in the power of the Spirit. We recognize the Lord's Day as the chief glory of these privileges and gifts; it is the Old Testament Sabbath raised from the dead, transfigured, glorified, and grown up into maturity. It is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, our weekly Easter, and the only feast day which must be honored and kept (1 Cor. 5:8).

It is in the spirit of Easter joy that we recognize the wisdom of our Fathers who wanted to put memorials of Christ everywhere (Dt. 6:5-9) so that we

might rejoice and give thanks always (Phil. 4:4, Eph. 5:20). Because we want to walk in thankfulness and gratitude, we want to mark our time with regular reminders of God's goodness and grace in particular events. For this reason, our congregations recognize and commemorate the five evangelical feast days (Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost) as the principal feasts of the church calendar which highlight specific events in the story of Christ which we want to give thanks for and meditate on. We also recognize that the various seasons of the historic calendar are useful for instruction, correction, and training in righteousness as they reflect on many other themes found throughout Scripture.

While commending the general principles of having our lives shaped by the story of Jesus, we nevertheless recognize that this gift has in the past been turned into a bludgeon with which to abuse the flock of God. We stand gratefully in the Reformation tradition which courageously freed the saints of God from those enslaving regulations related to saint days, penitential seasons, and superstitious fasting. In so far as various practices and laws had become obligatory apart from scriptural warrant, or were used to enforce unbiblical understandings of grace, salvation, and forgiveness, or became stumbling blocks for the faithful, we condemn such abuses and warn our people to likewise remember these lessons from the history of the church.

Finally, while we recognize the importance of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting in the lives of all followers of Jesus, we believe that sinners have particular tendencies to turn these gifts into pits to fall into (Mt. 6:1-18). Various forms of fasting and observance of days can have an appearance of wisdom, but it is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23). The true fast that God has commanded is to loose the bonds of wickedness and to let the oppressed go free, to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked (Is. 58:5-8). In order to keep the fast faithfully, the warnings of Christ specifically related to hypocrisy in prayer, almsgiving, and fasting

must be thoughtfully and consistently applied to practice (Mt. 6:1-18). Nor may believers grieve one another by eating or not eating, celebrating or not celebrating, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:15-17). Therefore we exhort our people to flee all idolatry, and hold fast to Christ who is the substance, the point of all of it. We further exhort our people that if they are going to celebrate certain days and seasons to do so as kings, free nobility, cultivating joyful and thankful celebrations with generosity and open-handedness towards neighbors, friends, and all those in need. And particularly with regard to seasons like Advent and Lent, we commit ourselves to cultivating godly and joyful repentance that is built on the bedrock of Christ's finished work on our behalf (2 Cor. 7:9-10), and which consistently overflows in joy. We encourage families to use these and all other days and seasons as opportunities for serving those in need, memorizing Scripture, singing Psalms, and giving themselves to and for one another in love.