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## **Independent Catholic Christian Church Policy on Fasting and Abstinence**

### **I. Fasting in Scripture**

Throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, fasting is practiced as a form of piety. In the Old Testament, there were both public fasts, called by kings or prophets and ultimately codified into specific fast days, and private fasts taken on by individuals. Fasting was practiced as an expression of mourning, as a form of supplication, as a means of penitence, and as a preparation for a desired divine communication. The prophets, while not condemning fasting, made it clear that, unaccompanied by just living and authentic faith in God, fasting was worthless. Jesus also condemned fasting done for show before other people and not for love of God, but he assumed that, after his death, his disciples would fast, and he began his own ministry with a forty-day fast in the wilderness. The early disciples fasted as a means of supplication.

### **II. Fasting in the Christian Tradition**

The church soon developed its own fasting practices. The Jewish practice encouraged fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, and the Christian practice, modeled on this, encouraged fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, in commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ. In imitation of the forty-day fast of Jesus and as a preparation for baptism at Easter, the forty-day season of Lent was introduced, later being extended first to penitents and then to the entire church. Four times a year, at the Ember Days, fasts were observed in preparation for ordinations. Vigils of important feasts were also observed by fasting, and Lent-like seasons of preparation and fasting were observed for other feasts besides Easter, most notably Advent in preparation for Christmas.

### **III. Meaning**

Fasting has several meanings. As an ascetical practice, it helps Christians to gain control of their appetites and bodies as a means of consecrating these to God. As a practice of prayer, it helps us pray with our whole bodies, and give physical reality to our prayers, as well as relieving us of tasks that would take us from our prayers. As an act of solidarity, it reminds us of the suffering of those who are destitute, and moves us to action – the practice of donating as alms the money that would be spent on food and other things given up is to be strongly commended.

### **III. Health**

Leviticus 18:5 states that "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgements: which if a person do, they shall live in them: I am the Lord". The rabbinic tradition has always held that, if a person's life is at stake, then religious obligations must be relaxed or even set aside to preserve life. Similarly, Jesus states that "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Therefore, fasting should never be carried out when it might have negative effects on a person's life or health, whether physical or psychological. In particular, with our culture's emphasis on beauty and thinness, some have developed eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia, or milder disorders – those who have struggled with such conditions are strongly advised not to fast, but rather to substitute another ascetical practice in place of abstaining from food if practical. Those who are ill, pregnant or nursing, very young, or elderly are also to avoid abstaining from food – they may also substitute another ascetical practice if desired.

### **IV. Recommended Practices**

For those who wish to fast, the traditional practice is to eat only one full meal per day, perhaps with a small breakfast and small collation together not equal to a full meal. Those who wish to abstain do so by giving up eating meat and alcohol. Those for whom these practices are not suitable are encouraged to find another ascetical practice, such as giving up particular forms of entertainment or other pleasurable things, particularly if money saved by doing so is thereby made available for alms. Those who fast or abstain from food may, of course, also carry out this form of asceticism as well. All of those who fast, abstain, or engage in other ascetical practices should avoid doing so in an ostentatious way. In addition, ICCC members who are fasting are strongly encouraged to spend extra time in prayer, and to give alms, and should do so where possible on days of fasting and abstinence when ascetical practices themselves may not be possible.

### **V. Seasons and Days of Fasting**

The liturgical diversity of the Independent Catholic Christian Church dictates that there will be local variations in which days are to be observed, and some in religious life may have additional days or seasons under their rule or constitutions. However, in general, the following days are those which ICCC members observing a Western calendar are encouraged to observe, subject to local observance:

#### A Table of Fasts

Ash Wednesday      Good Friday

Other days of fasting, on which the Church recommends such a measure of abstinence as is more especially suited to extraordinary acts and exercises of devotion:

1. The Forty Days of Lent.

2. The Ember Days at the Four Seasons, being the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, September 14, and December 13.
3. All the Fridays in the Year, except Christmas Day, and The Epiphany, or any Friday which may intervene between those Feasts.

#### Days of Solemn Supplication

The three Rogation Days, being the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before the Ascension of our Lord.

#### **VI. The Eucharistic Fast**

The Eucharistic fast, whether from midnight, for three hours, or for one hour, is a salutary practice recommended to the Faithful; however, it is not obligatory in this Jurisdiction, and the Faithful are urged to receive regardless of whether or not they have fasted, if they are spiritually disposed. The elderly, the infirm, pregnant women, and any others whose health would be affected are strongly discouraged from observing the Eucharistic fast.