**The Faith That Unites Us: The Nicene Creed**

(Translation is from the Book of Confessions)

**We believe in one God**, the Father, the Almighty, **maker of heaven and earth**, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the **Virgin Mary** and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and **is seated at the right hand of the Father**. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is **worshiped** and glorified, who has **spoken through the prophets**. We believe in one holy **catholic** and **apostolic** Church. We acknowledge one **baptism** for the **forgiveness of sins**. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**The Emphases that Divide Us: Roman Catholic and Reformed**

Nine Enduring Differences

**“We believe in one God”: Different perspectives on how we know God**

* Roman Catholic: Although it is difficult, and revelation is much sturdier, we can know some things about God by the use of natural reason (with the aid of grace).
* Reformed: Due to the effect of sin on the natural mind, there is little we can know about God without Scripture. We will go astray and worship an idol of our own making.

**“Maker of Heaven and Earth”: Different understandings of the relationship between Nature and (supernatural) Grace**

* Roman Catholic: Human nature retains more integrity after the Fall of Humanity. The effect of supernatural grace is to heal and elevate nature, so that it might be restored to original righteousness.
* Reformed: Human nature was more damaged in the Fall of Humanity. The effect of supernatural Grace is to replace or reanimate our fallen nature with a new nature in union with that of Christ.

**“The Virgin Mary”: Different views of Mary and her role in our Christian lives**

* Roman Catholic: The early Christians venerated Mary as “theotokos,” God-bearer. Her own conception was without sin, which made her the appropriate vessel for the incarnation. She intercedes with her Son on our behalf.
* Reformed: Mary is to be honored as the first Christian who responded to Jesus Christ with obedience and faith. To venerate her or to ask for her intervention is to set up an idol in competition with the triune God, and especially with Christ.

**“Seated at the right hand of the Father”: Different theories of how Jesus Christ is fully present in the Mass/the Lord’s Supper**

* Roman Catholic: We “remember” the sacrifice of Jesus by liturgically re-enacting his death for the world. By the Holy Spirit the bread and wine (although externally unchanged) truly become Jesus’ body and blood, to feed our souls.
* Reformed: Jesus died once for all time; no priest has power to re-enact his death. Instead, the Holy Spirit lifts us up to heaven where Jesus is now, in a real, spiritual reception of his body and blood.

**“Spoken through the Prophets”: Different perspectives on the relationship between the Bible and the Church**

* Roman Catholic: The church came first: Believers testified to their faith via the Bible. They also do so through tradition, which is the ongoing interpretation of the Bible. Both are authoritative for believers.
* Reformed: The Bible came first: The Bible contains the preaching of Good News. The church is the company of those who were destined to respond to the gospel in faith. Only Scripture has authority, not tradition.

**“Catholic church”: Different views of how the Christian Church is/should be structured**

* Roman Catholic: Jesus explicitly founded the Church on the Apostle Peter (“rock”), the Bishop of Rome, who has authority over all bishops, priests and deacons. This hierarchical structure houses and preserves the meaning of the Gospel.
* Reformed: Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church. Ministers are “stewards of the ministries of God,” but do not differ otherwise from those they serve. Ministers and elders govern together by the Spirit’s guidance.

**“Apostolic church”: Different standards of connection to the early Christians**

* Roman Catholic: Every priest who is ordained by the laying on of hands is part of an unbroken authoritative chain that stretches back to the disciples themselves (called “apostolic succession”). In this way purity and connection are preserved.
* Reformed: Every Christian who reads the Bible is part of the apostolic tradition, since the Bible is the living witness of the apostles to Jesus. By Scripture both purity and connection are preserved.

**“Baptism”: Different understanding of what happens in the sacraments**

* Roman Catholic: Scripture/Tradition has handed down seven sacraments, by which sin can be cleansed from the soul so that believers can be strengthened in holiness and can merit glory (by God’s grace)
* Reformed:Jesus instituted only two sacraments in Scripture. The sacraments make the Word of the Gospel tangible so that those who are destined to persevere until the end can be strengthened in holiness (by God’s grace).

**“The Forgiveness of Sins”: Different theology and practice for dealing with sin in believers**

* Roman Catholic: Baptism cleanses original sin. The sacraments maintain this holiness, especially penance (contrition, confession, satisfaction) through an ordained priest (absolution).
* Reformed: Baptism is a sign and seal of the Holy Spirit’s claim on us. Every day the Spirit convicts us of sin, assures us of forgiveness, and empowers us to imitate Christ’s holiness. We confess to one another.