

Covenant of Belonging

A guide for belonging at Forum - what we believe, and what it looks like to live it together.

SESSION ONE & SESSION TWO

Glad you're here.

If you're holding this, it's because you've started wondering whether this might be *your* church. That's a big question, and we won't rush it. This booklet is yours to keep, write in, and have as a record of what we'll walk through together across two sessions.

TWO QUESTIONS BEHIND EVERYTHING

01 What does it mean to be the church?

02 What is my part in it?

Covenant, not _____.

Blanks like the one above are for you to fill in during the teachings.

Membership here isn't a service you consume or a club you join. It's a **covenant** — a binding, mutual commitment between two parties about how they will treat one another. Not a transaction, but a **vow**.

There is a lot of blank space throughout this guide for you to take notes and write down any questions you might want to ask.

IN THIS BOOKLET

Session One — What We Believe

Session Two — What Belonging Looks Like

Your Next Step & the Pathway Forward

What We Believe

Who we are, where we came from, and the truths we stand on.

Who we are

In 1954, eleven people began meeting in a sheep barn on the old Boone County Fairgrounds, the property we now call the ARC. Without a dedicated building or programming, they wanted to **unite around the truth of God's Word and follow Jesus together**. That is still the whole vision. The only real difference between them and us is that there are a few more of us now (*and we don't have a sheep barn*).

The Restoration _____

Forum stands in the Restoration Movement, born in America in the early 1800s, from a simple desire: to clear away centuries of accumulated human tradition and return to the Christianity of the New Testament. **Jesus at the _____ and the _____ of the Scriptures guiding all that we do.**

a simple statement that says a lot about what we believe:

In essentials, _____. In opinions, _____.

In all things, _____.

On the things that are truly central, we stand together. On the variety of secondary questions, we give each other room. And in everything — love.

Five things baked into our DNA

What a church aligned with the Restoration Movement looks like practically.

- 01 _____ as the final authority of faith and practice
- 02 Congregational _____
- 03 An emphasis on Christian _____ that goes beyond denominational traditions
- 04 Believers' Baptism by _____
- 05 _____ practice of the Lord's Supper

AT YOUR TABLE · SESSION ONE

ROUND 1 — OUR BELIEFS AROUND A TABLE

1. What's your story with Forum — what brought you here, and what's kept you coming back?
2. What do you think it means to be a member of a local church? Have you been a member elsewhere (if so, what did it involve)? "Covenant, not consumer." Does that reframe how you've thought about belonging to a church?
3. What is your faith background, and how does it align with or deviate from our background? Are you familiar with the Restoration Movement? What questions does it raise?

 Be sure to write down any questions, comments, or concerns you might have.

Seven statements, in three movements

Movement One — The God We Worship

01 THE TRINITY

“We believe in one creator God, eternally existing in three co-equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

02 JESUS CHRIST

“Out of love for the world, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who was fully human and fully divine and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, suffered death on the cross, was buried, physically rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven.”

03 THE HOLY SPIRIT

“We believe the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. He indwells, empowers, and gifts the followers of Jesus as they are led to proclaim the gospel and grow in spiritual maturity.”

*Because God is, in his own being, three persons in perfect love, **His nature is communal** — not an add-on. A covenant of belonging reflects His very heart.*

Movement Two — The Word & the Gospel

04 SCRIPTURE

“We believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are fully inspired by God and are the final authority for faith and practice.”

05 SALVATION

“We believe salvation is a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. His death is the only sufficient payment for our sins. This salvation is available for anyone who has faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.”

Movement Three — Entering & Enduring

06 THE STARTING POINT

“We believe that faith in Christ begins by repenting from sin, confessing faith, being baptized by immersion, and continues as we live according to the pattern and teachings of Jesus.”

07 ESCHATOLOGY

“We believe those who have faith in Christ have eternal life with God, and those who reject Christ are eternally separated from God. Christ will return one day in glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom and reign are without end.”

Seven — on purpose

We could have written seventy. We didn't. We drew a circle around what is genuinely **essential** and left room for liberty on the hundreds of _____ questions Christians have always disagreed about.

These doctrines aren't a wall to keep people out — they're the shared **foundation** that lets very different people belong to one another. **You cannot _____ with people you share nothing with.**

AT YOUR TABLE · SESSION ONE

ROUND 2 — OUR BELIEFS AROUND A TABLE

1. Which of the seven is easiest to affirm? Which is hardest, or raises a question?
2. Where have you seen doctrine used to divide?
3. Baptism by immersion is part of how we receive members — where are you in your baptism story?

 Be sure to write down any questions, comments, or concerns you might have.

SESSION TWO

What Belonging Looks Like

On a Tuesday. In real life. The practice, not the theory.

Hesed

God's , faithful, covenant-keeping love — poured out on his people *even in the middle of their failure* . Not based on how they perform. Based on who God is.

THE HINGE OF EVERYTHING

The way God has loved **us** is the pattern for how we now love **each other** . None of it earns God's love — all of it lives in response to it.

The church is a body.

ROMANS 12:4-5

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, *and we all* _____ *to each other.*

We don't become members of an institution. We become members of **each other**.

Christ is also the _____ of the church, *which is his body*. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.

COLOSSIANS 1:18

If Christ is the head, the church is not mine to _____, and not mine to _____. It's His.

THE COVENANT RUNS BOTH WAYS

Membership isn't a one-way list of ***demands***. Our leadership, comprised of elders and ministry staff, two communities of servant-leaders, ***commits to shepherd*** this church (prayer and the ministry of the Word, spiritual care, a life worth imitating) and ***commits to serve*** this church (equipping every member for ministry, stewarding resources to meet practical needs, mutual accountability, and engagement in God's mission).

📖 You can explore our theology of membership at myforum.me/membership

The seven commitments

- 01 Prayer and Ministry of the Word** - We pray over and with our church as a whole and as individuals. We take responsibility for the clear, sound proclamation of God's Word in every environment we steward.
- 02 Commitment to lead from our abiding connection to Jesus** - we lead out of our abiding connection to Jesus, our ongoing apprenticeship, and imitation of Him in how we structure, lead, and care for the ministry.
- 03 Spiritual Care** - we care for our church community by intentionally leading spiritual conversations, helping others connect to a community of faith, and shepherding spiritual formation.
- 04 Stewardship of Resources** - we faithfully steward our time, giftings, and finances for the advancement of God's kingdom through this local church. Our leadership is committed to rigorous financial processes and an independent system of checks and balances to safeguard the generosity of others.
- 05 Mutual Care & Accountability** - we offer biblical accountability to you in love, and we hold ourselves to the same standard, answerable to God, to each other as leaders, and to this congregation. We commit to environments where truth can be spoken and people are safe.
- 06 Intentional Equipping** - We commit to providing biblically based gatherings, programming, and events designed to help others grow in their faith.
- 07 Engagement in Mission & Outreach** — we share the good news of Jesus and help to support the work of the ministry locally, nationally, and globally.

The seven commitments

- 01 Confession of Faith** — we affirm a shared understanding of the core truths of the faith.
- 02 Commitment to Apprenticeship under Jesus** — we continue to grow in abiding, apprenticeship, and imitation of Jesus through personal and corporate spiritual
- 03 Participation in Worship Gatherings and Communion** — we prioritize gathering together, weekly around the table of Jesus, uniting in praise and prayer to God, and to engaging with Scripture.
- 04 Stewardship of Resources** — we faithfully steward our time, giftings, and finances for the advancement of God’s kingdom through this local church.
- 05 Mutual Care & Accountability** — we take responsibility for the people in our community, intentionally engaging, encouraging, praying, and meeting practical needs, and we speak truth in love and receive it when it is spoken to us.
- 06 Support for Leadership** — we pray for and support the ministers and elders God has placed over this church.
- 07 Engagement in Mission & Outreach** — we share the good news of Jesus in Columbia, across our state, and to the ends of the earth.

If you are interested in more, we did an 8-part teaching series entitled “The Covenant of Belonging.”

The Purpose of Commitment

We believe the purpose of the local church is to _____ and _____ God (Eph. 1:3-14), display His _____ and _____ (Eph. 3:10), and _____ the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

Those who enter a **covenant of belonging** with Forum Christian Church are entering a shared commitment to the church's **purpose**.

*A covenant, not a contract: a contract says “I’ll give you X if you give me Y.” A covenant says “**I am committing myself to you.**” That is Hesed.*

AT YOUR TABLE · SESSION TWO

ROUND 1 — THE COMMITMENTS, BOTH DIRECTIONS

1. Which member commitment comes most naturally? Which one stretches you most?
2. “Covenant, not contract.” In your own words — what’s the difference, and why does it matter?
3. Does being under spiritual leadership give you more pause, or more relief? Why?

🔗 If you are interested in more, we did an 8-part teaching series entitled “The Covenant of Belonging.”

Your part starts with worship

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice, the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

ROMANS 12:1

Serving the body is the _____ a surrendered life naturally takes.

Have you considered what spiritual gift God has given you? List which ones come to mind.

Every gift is given **for the** _____

Not one is given for your status or résumé. The Spirit placed a gift in you on purpose, and the purpose is for *those around you*.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

Nobody's grateful for their elbow — until it stops working, and suddenly you can't eat, dress, or lift your kid. The body needs it desperately. So stop waiting to be the hand or the face. **Be the elbow God made you to be.**

Be the elbow.

The gifts — one list

Every gift the New Testament names is gathered from four passages: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. Not an exhaustive list of the Spirit's power, but a picture of how wide the Spirit's generosity runs.

01	Prophecy	Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10, 28; Eph 4:11	02	Service	Rom 12:7; 1 Pet 4:11
03	Teaching	Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11	04	Exhortation / encouragement	Rom 12:8
05	Giving	Rom 12:8	06	Leading	Rom 12:8
07	Mercy	Rom 12:8	08	Word of wisdom	1 Cor 12:8
09	Word of knowledge	1 Cor 12:8	10	Faith	1 Cor 12:9
11	Healings	1 Cor 12:9, 28	12	Miracles	1 Cor 12:10, 28
13	Discernment of spirits	1 Cor 12:10	14	Tongues	1 Cor 12:10, 28
15	Interpretation of tongues	1 Cor 12:10, 30	16	Apostleship	1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11
17	Helps	1 Cor 12:28	18	Administration	1 Cor 12:28
19	Evangelism	Eph 4:11	20	Shepherding / pastoring	Eph 4:11
21	Celibacy — and marriage as its counterpart	1 Cor 7:7			

ALLUDED TO, BUT NEVER LABELED A GIFT

Suffering for Christ
Phil 1:29

Hospitality
1 Pet 4:9; Rom 12:13 — contextually adjacent to the gift lists

Music / psalmody
1 Cor 14:26

No one list is meant to be exhaustive, and no one person gets them all or is guaranteed just one gift for their entire lifetime.

That's the point - the body needs what you were given.

Statistically, about 50% of those who gather on a Sunday served last year in some capacity. Encouraging for sure, but not God's design. God didn't build the body to run at fifty percent.

It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:11

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:18

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:18

Being a member is not _____ .

Being a member is not about finding a good seat and watching others use their gifts. You have a gift the Spirit gave you on purpose — and this body genuinely needs your part.

🕒 Is using your gift to serve others a new idea? If not, what areas has God allowed you to serve others?

AT YOUR TABLE · SESSION TWO

ROUND 2 — YOUR GIFTS, YOUR PLACE

1. Which one or two gifts feel most like you? Where have others affirmed them before?
2. Where do you sense God might be inviting you to serve in this body?
3. What's one honest barrier that has kept you on the "spectating" side?

■ DEVOTED & ACCOUNTABLE

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

ACTS 2:42

Devotion is not a feeling — it's a . It shows up on a calendar. The New Testament shows it through the “one another” commands — and you can't do one in the abstract:

Love

Serve

Forgive

Encourage

Bear with

Honor

... one another.

Under shepherds, not bosses

Scripture pairs “*obey your leaders... they keep watch over your souls*” (Heb 13:17) with “*not domineering... but being examples to the flock*” (1 Pet 5). Submitting to **that** kind of leadership is a protection, not a threat.

🔍 *Make note of how you react to this language.*

ACCOUNTABILITY IN MATTHEW 18

Privately first → then one or two others → only then the church. The goal at every step, in Jesus' words, is to **gain your brother back**. It's designed to restore a relationship, not destroy one.

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. “I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven. “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

Matthew 28:15-20

AN HONEST WORD

For some, “church discipline” doesn’t sound like protection — it sounds like a wound. People have watched it done in cruel, controlling, unbiblical ways. That’s real, and grievous, and we won’t rush past it.

But the **abuse** of a thing does not erase its **right use**. Done the way Jesus describes — gentle, patient, grieved, aimed at restoration — that is not abuse. That is love.

Accountability is what makes belonging **safe**, not scary. To be a member is to be *known*, really known, cared for and watched over, and loved enough to be told the truth. **That isn’t a _____ to your belonging. That is the belonging.**

The pathway to living as a member at Forum.

- ☐ **Experiencing** our church community for at least 6 months.
- ☐ **Attend** a Connect Event.
- ☒ **Participation** in the Covenant Course.
- ☐ A **one-on-one** conversation with an elder.
- ☐ **Affirmation** of our core doctrines and baptism by immersion.
- ☐ **Finding a place** to use your gifting for the sake of others.

About that elder conversation

It's not a test or an interrogation. If something landed hard — a question, a doubt, a wound, an honest "I'm not sure I'm ready" — that conversation is exactly where it belongs. Don't carry it out the door by yourself.

Wherever you are, from your first time in the building to fifty years in, we believe there's a next step of faith in front of you. If something is stirring, **don't let it pass. Take the step.**

AT YOUR TABLE · SESSION TWO

ROUND 2 — YOUR GIFTS, YOUR PLACE

1. Which one or two gifts feel most like you? Where have others affirmed them before?
2. Where do you sense God might be inviting you to serve in this body?
3. What's one honest barrier that has kept you on the "spectating" side?

■ WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

The pathway to membership

✍ Are you ready to become a member? If not, that's ok, but would you mind sharing with us why?

Your table leader has Covenant Cards to sign if you are ready to join our church community today.