



Community Groups: Vision and Guidelines

We exist to treasure Christ, equip believers, and send disciples for the glory of God.

Forest Hills Baptist Church

Community Groups

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A Vision for Community

Living in community is a dangerous pursuit. Everyone would agree that it is noble and some would even say that it's necessary. However, very few actually accompany their call to community with the calls of confession, repentance and accountability. Perhaps one of the biggest fears we all share is that someone will actually discover who we are at the core. This fear can only be dispelled with the unconditional love of Christ through the gospel and then exemplified through our brothers and sisters at our side. Hebrews 10:19-25 offers several key, yet simple, aspects of community.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We must hold one another accountable. (Stirring one another up to love and good works)

We must encourage one another.

We must be together. (Not neglecting to meet together)

The basis of this community is the gospel. (Because of the new and living way through Christ's blood)

While corporate worship is a glorious time, it also proves a more difficult context to practice personal accountability, encouragement, and "togetherness." Community groups provide a context where these essential elements can be more faithfully pursued.

Aim and Focus

At Forest Hills Baptist Church we exist to treasure Christ, equip believers, and send disciples for the glory of God. In seeking to carry out this vision, community groups are an essential element.

Treasuring – Treasuring Christ together is the aim of community groups. Rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (Romans 12:15) is an integral part of seeing and savoring Christ in the ebb and flow of life.

Equipping – Christians are equipped not only in direct instruction, but also in living life alongside fellow believers. Through prayer, encouragement, accountability, and discussion as well as mutual application of biblical truth, those involved in community groups are able to experience a remarkable means of equipping grace.

Sending – The ultimate aim of community groups is not to merely create a more personal environment, though that certainly is part of the purpose, but rather to serve as a launching pad for organic life-on-life ministry. Those involved in community groups treasure Christ together and are equipped as iron sharpens iron in order to reach out to others.

In addition to the key aspects of the vision statement, there are also other important principles that apply to community groups at Forest Hills.

Multi-generational – Titus 2 calls believers to intentional and mutual growth between younger and older believers. As such, community groups will be intentionally diverse according to age.

Flexibility – The organization and implementation of Community groups at Forest Hills does have some guiding principles. But these principles are recommendations. Each group has the liberty to make their dynamics workable in their own context.

Guidelines At-a-glance

Numbers	Each community groups should have no more than 10 people
Topic	Community groups will be sermon-based. Groups will further discuss and apply the passage and message from the Sunday morning worship service.
Meeting Place	The home of the community group's leaders is the primary meeting place.
Meeting Length	Each meeting is recommended to last approximately an hour and a half.
Meeting Time	There is flexibility as to when the group might meet. This may differ from group to group. We do ask that groups not meet during already scheduled church services, meetings, or activities.
Duration	Community groups will meet from January to May and from September to November.
Format	In a typical hour and a half timeframe, there should be time for fellowship, prayer, and discussion of the sermon.

Group Leaders

Community group leaders are facilitators of discussion, encouragement, sharing, prayer and accountability. It is a remarkable ministry of togetherness in the gospel. The following list comprises key elements that group leaders are responsible for or for delegating amongst the group.

Responsibilities

- Extend hospitality to the group as you meet in your home.
- Communicate on a regular basis regarding meeting times, prayer requests, and important information.
- Foster an atmosphere of open sharing, encouragement, vulnerability, and accountability.
- Be intentional about keeping the discussion on topic, but allow participants liberty.
- Complete and submit weekly attendance reports using Google forms.
- Lead the group in deciding how to handle childcare and other logistical issues.
- Make copies of the discussion questions, which will be sent Sunday afternoons after the morning message for everyone in your group (A sample discussion guide can be found on page 14)
- Mentor other potential community group leaders.

Suggestions

- Organize a rotation of group members for providing light refreshments.
- Organize an outreach event once during the year outside of normal meeting time.
- Organize a fellowship event once during the year outside of normal meeting time.

Metrics

Feedback is essential to evaluating and improving anything and community groups are not an exception. Community groups at Forest Hills should be the best they can be and this requires a metric of assessment. As such, input from community group leaders and community group members is welcomed and requested.

Feedback from Community Group Leaders – Leaders will complete a weekly report that records attendance; however, this report also asks for feedback on how the meeting went. Leaders are encouraged to provide feedback through this simple weekly report. Google forms will be used to gather this weekly input.

Feedback from Community Group Members– Random community group members from each community group will be selected to complete a brief survey providing input about their experience in community groups. Google forms will be used to gather this input.

Yearly Review Meeting – Community group leaders will meet at the conclusion of each year of community groups to discuss what went well and what can be improved.

Sample Schedules

The following schedules are not offered as requirements, but as simple suggested frameworks. Refreshments are certainly not required, but are certainly welcome.

Sample Schedule A

Arrival and greeting	10 minutes
Light refreshments and fellowship	20 minutes
Biblical discussion and application	30 minutes
Time of sharing and prayer	20 minutes
Announcements and recap	10 minutes

Sample Schedule B

Arrival and greeting	10 minutes
Biblical discussion and application	40 minutes
Time of sharing and prayer	20 minutes
Fellowship	20 minutes

Child Care

Each community group will have different dynamics. Some groups will have extremely small children while other groups might not have children at all. Therefore, each group can think through how to best arrange for childcare. Possible options are listed below.

Group Member Rotation – Group members can sign up to watch the children on a rotating basis. Ideally, each member would only miss the discussion once out of every five to six meetings.

Child Participation – Some groups may find that the children involved can either participate or at least avoid being a distraction. In this case, no childcare will be needed.

Group Babysitter – Some groups might find it beneficial to combine their resources and pay to have a babysitter during the designated meeting time.

Community Group Rotation – All community groups meeting on Sunday evening could rotate providing childcare from 5:45 to 7:45. This would be an opportunity to serve together as a community group.

Group Sign-up

Community groups provide quite the opportunity to foster connections. These connections will grow deeper over time, but the goal is not to form cliques. Groups are intentionally designed to be multi-generational to exemplify Titus 2 and to avoid forming cliques.

Initial Sign-up – Initially, members will sign-up for community groups by selecting available slots in a group. Slots will be broken down and limited in such a manner to diversify the age breakdown of the group. August will be the month to emphasize sign-up for members who have not joined a group and for new members. However, signing up for a community group is encouraged at any time.

Ongoing Sign-up

At any point someone is interested in joining a community group they should simply request a sign-up form from the welcome center and they can be connected to a group with availability and the best fit. The community group coordinator or the group leaders of their assigned group will contact them.

New Members

The membership 101 class will also include connecting new members to a community group. The teacher of the membership class will include information on community groups and encourage participation.

Community Group Leaders
Weekly Checklist

	Pray for the group and the upcoming meeting.
	Attend the weekly worship service and listen with the discussion in mind.
	Review and make copies of discussion questions.
	Facilitate the weekly meeting and communicate any important information.
	Complete the weekly community group report.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will community groups be replacing Sunday school?

No. Sunday school emphasizes equipping through direct instruction in the word of God while community groups emphasize equipping through genuine fellowship, encouragement, and accountability.

Will community groups be replacing Sunday evening service?

Yes. Forest Hills Baptist Church exists to treasure Christ, equip believers, and send disciples for the glory of God. We believe that community groups are a necessary step in order to treasure Christ together and to be equipped through true fellowship. This is not reducing the amount of time we meet together, but strategically meeting together in a way that maximizes fellowship, vulnerability, encouragement, and accountability.

Do community groups have to meet on Sunday evenings?

No. While this particular time is recommended, it is not required. What works for one group may or may not work for another so each group is encouraged to find the optimum time for their members.

How does someone sign-up for community groups?

Our church will be emphasizing community group sign-up during specific times; however, anyone can sign up at any time by simply going to the welcome center and completing a community group sign-up form (See page 13). The community group coordinator and their assigned group leaders will contact them with specific information about meeting times and location.

Why do community groups have a diversity of ages?

There is wisdom in learning from more mature believers. Titus 2 calls believers to this kind of multi-generational discipleship. Also, this is a practical way to avoid cliques and increase gospel-centered fellowship and growth.

Why meet in homes instead of at church?

Homes provide a more relaxed atmosphere, which is more conducive to open discussion and true fellowship.



Community Groups Sign-up

Please complete the following form and our community group coordinator will find a group with availability in your area. You will be contacted with the contact information of the group leaders, the address, and meeting times.

Date: _____ **Name:** _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Family (if applicable)

Will your spouse be joining you? Yes or No

If so, include their name. _____

Will children be joining you? Yes or No

If so, how many? _____

_____ For Community group coordinator to complete _____

Community Group Leaders: _____

Meeting location: _____

Meeting Time: _____ **Number attending:** _____

Additional Information:

Forest Hills Baptist Church
Community Group Discussion Guide

1 John 4:1-6

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the most impacting point from the sermon this morning?

2. What are some of the prevailing philosophies of our age?

3. How can one be irreligious but spiritual? How does our society demonstrate this?

4. In what ways can believers test the spirits of the world to determine if they are of God?

5. The mind is an integral part of exercising discernment. Is this neglected today in the church? How and why?

6. The sound teaching of the word is a ministry of the Spirit. Can experience be confused with being led by the Spirit? How?

Prayer Concerns: