



Family Forum



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INTRODUCTION

This leaflet explains the purpose of the Thornbury Baptist Church (TBC) meeting known as the 'Family Forum'.

Every church has a way in which authority is expressed, decisions made, direction set and information shared. The models most generally found are:

- **Episcopal:** where ultimate authority rests with bishops or possibly the Bishop or Pope e.g. Anglican or Roman Catholic churches.
- **Presbyterial or Central:** where the final authority rests with the central, national gathering of elected members from the churches. Clergy play a big part, e.g. Methodists and United Reform churches.
- **Congregational:** where authority and government rest with the local congregation who together seek the will of Jesus Christ through His teaching and the Bible, e.g. Baptists and Brethren.

Among 'congregational' type churches, some are governed by:

- The leaders or elders.
- The church members meeting

In this church we are somewhere between those two. Our church members' meeting is called the 'Family Forum'.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH ORGANISATION

There is not one, fixed, form of church structure, government and leadership in the New Testament. The church was engaged in mission and growth and developing its structures - it was just a few years since Jesus died and rose again and as churches were established, each one, under the direction of their leaders, was having to work out how to follow Jesus and 'be' Church. But the Bible does give basic principles on how structure and government should work:

- The word 'church' means 'those called out to be together'. Its basic use was for the Greek city forum which made all decisions for that city. In this sense it was a democracy. Jesus took this word but used it in a theocratic sense when he said, 'I will build my church', [Matthew 16 vs 18].

Taking this as a basis:

- A local church is made up of those people called out of the world by Jesus, to be together, to know His will and affirm together what He wants done.
- This means that the government of the church is theocratic and not democratic. It is government by God/Jesus through His body, the church. Jesus is the head. (In the Bible, the word church refers to either the whole, world-wide church, or the local church in one area, so there are no national or denominational structures).

In the book of Acts:

- The leaders told the brothers (members?) to choose other leaders to do certain work (Acts 6 vs 1-6).
- The disciples (members) decided together to help the churches in Judea (Acts 11 vs 29).
- The church in Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem to discuss doctrine with the leaders there (Acts 15 vs 1 etc).
- The church in Jerusalem, with its leaders, welcomed them and heard of the problem. The leaders met and sought an answer (vs 6). Then those leaders acted with the whole

church (vs 22). Their conclusion was, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to ... but to ...' (vs 28) (Acts 15 vs 4 etc).

- Paul and Barnabas appointed (or had appointed) elders ... the word used for 'appointed' means 'to vote by show of hand'. Perhaps the apostles chose the elders but the church endorsed them by 'voting' (Acts 14 vs 23).

THE FAMILY FORUM

Taking what is understood of the New Testament, within TBC the 'Family Forum' is:

'The gathering together of the members of the local body of Christ at TBC, under the leadership of Jesus and the leading of the Holy Spirit, together with the Leadership Team, to seek the mind and will of Christ by prayer and discussion and then to plan appropriate action to accomplish His will.'

All are encouraged to share thoughts, pictures, dreams, scriptures etc with the Leadership Team. God has poured out His Spirit on all His servants (Acts 2 vs 17 and 18).

The Family Forum will deal with a number of issues but in particular:

- The appointment of Elders and other Leaders.
- The appointment of salaried staff.
- Matters of belief and how faith is practised and so, where necessary, discipline and correction.
- Action with regard to:
 - Pastoral care
 - Children and youth
 - Evangelism
 - Mission
 - Moral and social action
 - Relationships to the wider Christian family.

In making major decisions affirmation will be given by a show of hands or, for the appointment of leaders, in writing. At Family Forums only members of the Church are eligible to take part in any affirmation process. The quorum at a Family Forum is 25% of the membership.

Notes are kept on all Family Forum meetings and these will be affirmed by the Family Forum as a true and accurate record of the meeting. These notes will be kept together and secure in a place for future reference.

Items for discussion at forthcoming Family Forums, together with the notes from the last Family Forum, will be issued to Members at least 10 days in advance of the meeting so that prayerful consideration can be given beforehand by those attending.

When we meet together in a Family Forum:

- Jesus is the centre and His will the concern of our hearts.
- Love is the key to fellowship, we love each other and at all times seek peace.
- Where there may be disagreement we continue to love and seek even more the mind of Christ.
- We allow Jesus to lead us through the Bible, through humble Leadership, by His Holy Spirit and through Spiritual Gifts into His will.

GUIDELINES

Many churches have rules or a constitution, this is not the case in TBC where the church is viewed as the body of Christ rather than formal organisation. There is some structure within TBC, enough to allow the body to function. Part of that structure is a set of 'Guidelines' which are available to all members, or those wishing to become members.