



# Joining the Vowed Community 201

*Following Jesus Together in Miami*

## **WHO WE ARE CALLED TO BE**

Rhythm is a community of people following Jesus and living in the rhythm of God's kingdom.

## **WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO**

Rhythm exists to form and grow disciples of Jesus who join God in the renewal of Miami.

We live into this purpose by:

- *Listening and responding to the Spirit's initiative personally and communally.*
- *Multipling teams of disciples to express and extend God's love.*
- *Embodying the beauty, wholeness, and diversity of God's kingdom.*

## **FOLLOWING JESUS TOGETHER IN MIAMI**

We believe that God calls us to commit ourselves not only to Christ, but also to following Jesus with a local expression of his Body, the church. Our community is one expression of the body of Christ in our city.

When someone asks how they can "be a part of Rhythm," our first response is simply to say, "Come have a seat at the table. We'd love for you to take part in everything we do. If you want in, you're in." However, if the question they're asking is "How do I live as a disciple of Jesus, commit myself to this community, and participate in the mission?" - then we invite them to consider becoming part of the Vowed Community.

Jesus announces in Mark 1:14 that *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

It's Jesus' announcement of the kingdom that draws our community forward toward the day when God's reign will be fully established on earth again and calls us to enter into the kingdom now as God's kingdom people.

Who we seek to be and all we desire to do is in response to Jesus' announcement that the kingdom is at hand and the declaration that our Creator God is making all things new. As the Holy Spirit gives hearing and response at Jesus' announcement we are ourselves entering the process of being made new. Discipleship is the word we use for this process of renewal and formation.

And discipleship is the primary way Jesus has invited us to participate in the kingdom.

***Our primary purpose as a church is to make disciples of Jesus in order that more and more people may receive and enter into the kingdom of God announced by Jesus.***

Becoming part of the Vowed Community means that a person is embracing their personal discipleship and Rhythm's communal calling to form and grow disciples in Miami. We believe the church is not a club bound by exclusive membership - instead, it is a community on mission bound together by the good news of Jesus and his kingdom. We are to be "partners in the gospel" (Philippians 1:5), called to a shared life and a shared mission.

In a city like Miami, concrete commitment in a church matters. It matters for the people in the community and it matters for the leaders. It is easy to become surprisingly autonomous and anonymous in a place like Miami. Without knowing it, we can become isolated, caught in the distraction of habits that move us slowly away from the love of God. And our lives can get out of balance, so driven by other competing forces that our walk with God and participation in the mission of Jesus is pushed to the side.

And it matters for the leaders. With so many people coming and going, it can be hard to know who we are responsible for and how to properly demonstrate God's love and care. Becoming part of the Vowed Community enables leaders to respond in covenant faithfulness to those who have committed themselves to Rhythm.

The heart behind this concrete commitment is love, joy, faithfulness, and grace. Whereas membership for many organizations, clubs and institutions involve consuming and receiving, joining the Vowed Community of Rhythm functions like a family and is marked by participation and service. Jesus said to his disciples, *"Freely you have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8). The Vowed Community is a spiritual family that has received God's grace and endeavors to share that grace with others inside and outside of the church.

Belonging to a healthy local church is vital for all believers. The letters found in the New Testament are written to early Jesus communities who had been joined together by the gospel of Christ (Romans 16:3-5). The people who made up these communities consistently worshiped together (Hebrews 10:24-25), were accountable to one another (Galatians 6:1), encouraged one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), served one another (1 Peter 4:10), and contended for the gospel together using their spiritual gifts and financial means to edify the church and move the mission forward (Philippians 1:5, 27; 1 Corinthians 12).

By committing to a shared identity and purpose as God's people we are taking a practical step to live out the New Testament vision of Christians living together as a body, in that we become connected as visible members of the church.

The following outlines the core convictions of Rhythm, the basic expectations of someone joining the Vowed Community, and how to take the next step. This is not meant to summarize all that we believe or do, individually or together, but to express the heart, vision, and general aspirations of Rhythm.



## CORE CONVICTIONS

### RHYTHM OF LIFE

Jesus first calls us to follow him - to be his disciple. The word “disciple” in Greek literally means “learner” or “apprentice.” This kind of relationship with Jesus is not simply about gathering the right information about God, but rather apprenticing our entire lives to Christ so that he can breathe his kingdom life, hope, healing, power, and transformation in us. Discipleship to Jesus means that our whole lives get formed and transformed by him and his way.

Another way to say this is that the whole-life formation and renewal that Jesus offers us includes our:

- *Head* (ideas, thoughts, assumptions)
- *Heart* (emotions, desires, passions)
- *Hands* (actions, choices, commitments)

The purpose of Rhythm is to form and grow disciples of Jesus who join God in the renewal of Miami. Disciples begin to form as they experience the transforming life and love of Jesus for the first time and begin to take steps towards Jesus. Disciples start to grow as they concretely apprentice themselves to Jesus, his way, and his rhythms. And that’s exactly why Rhythm has a Rhythm of Life.

A Rhythm of Life helps us root our lives in Jesus and his core “rhythms.” A life in Christ calls for dying to self and living in the Spirit. We are to “put on the Lord Christ Jesus” (Romans 13:14). Following Jesus doesn’t happen accidentally - we need to have concrete rhythms that continually form and transform our hearts, desires, thoughts, and actions. Ultimately, we want to grow as disciples of Jesus and to form new disciples. A Rhythm of Life offers a pathway for this kind of formation in Christ (*see Appendices A - Rhythm of Life Guide*).

The Rhythm of Life is our attempt to articulate the core elements of following Jesus and growing together. This pathway for discipleship guides and shapes our church’s life together in Christ. It is a commitment to anchor our lives in the concrete rhythms of loving God (*worship*), joining God in his redemption project (*mission*), following Jesus in the core issues of practical living (*surrender*), and to do all of this together (*community*).

### MISSIONAL THEOLOGY

A person or church’s theology (belief about God - who God is and what God is like) radically informs that person or church’s values, understanding of “the good life”, dreams, commitments, and passions. Rhythm’s theology is informed by the Bible (comprised of Protestant Old and New Testaments), but principally by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our primary understanding of what God is like comes from Jesus (John 14:6; Colossians 1:15-19) and our primary understanding of what God is doing in the world comes from Jesus (Luke 4:16-20; Matthew 28:16-20; Colossians 1:20-23).

In Jesus we discover that at the core, God is overflowing with love and willing to go to great lengths to express, communicate, and display his love. Theologian David Bosch said, “God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission.” In other words, God has a mission to rescue and restore the whole world, and invites us (the Church) to join him in that mission.

So we read and interpret the Bible through this kind of missional lens. We believe the Bible was written by people guided by God's Spirit and affirm what it says it is: authoritative, inspired, illumined by the Spirit and useful for teaching, correcting, and wisdom (Psalm 119; John 16:12-14; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21). We believe that the Spirit continues to speak to us today through the Bible. God calls us to immerse ourselves in this authoritative narrative communally and individually so we can faithfully interpret and live out that story today as we are led by the Spirit of God (see *Appendices B - The Story of Scripture*).

The Apostles' Creed is the foundational creed (a statement of belief) of Christian churches. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; most of the creed dates from the early 2nd century. The creed was originally used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome. Though many traditions and flavors of Christianity throughout the ages have different interpretations of the Bible, and embrace various doctrinal nuances, the core essence of what the Scriptures teach is found in the words of the Apostles' Creed. Therefore, we have fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ who profess their faith as follows:

*We believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,  
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:  
who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.  
The third day He arose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall  
come to judge the living and the dead.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.*

We also acknowledge the historical significance and prophetic call of the Lausanne Covenant (1974), agreeing with it completely, and the reaffirmations of the Manila Manifesto (1989) and Cape Town Commitment (2010). These confessional documents help to express our theological and missional convictions. We stand to be both challenged and guided by these core expressions of theological commitment as we grow and mature into the church that God has destined us to be. Visit [lausanne.org](http://lausanne.org) to read these confessional documents in their entirety.

Rhythm is a non-denominational, Protestant church so we are not directly associated with a specific theological tradition. One of the implications of this is that we are a church that connects to people from a variety of theological streams. We have people who have been deeply influenced by Presbyterian theology and Methodist theology. We have people who grew up in the Catholic church and others who come from a Charismatic expression of the church. Our conviction is that a missional theology centered around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus will keep us moving in the right direction - towards greater love of Jesus, humbly learning from other's stories and theological influences, and empowered for sacrificial mission.

## **MOVEMENTAL ECCLESIOLOGY**

In light of the missional nature and character of God expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we organize our life together around Jesus and his mission. Our theology (belief about God - who God is and what God is like) informs our ecclesiology (belief about the Church - who the Church is and what the Church is called to do). In other words, we believe that the Body of Christ must look like Jesus.

The Church is not a building or a worship service. The Church is the people of God intentionally extending the love and power of Jesus to those who are distant from God. The Church finds her life and direction in Jesus. The Church is movemental because it keeps moving - it's adaptable, fluid, nimble, relational, and reproducible. In other words, the Church does not exist for itself, but for announcing the good news of Jesus to individuals and communities of people so that all may experience the renewal and abundance of God.

Rhythm organizes itself around the mission and movement of God in two basic ways: Missional Churches and Public Worship.

### ***Missional Churches***

This is the primary expression of living as the Church in Rhythm. And it is the primary way that we accomplish our purpose of forming and growing disciples who join God in the renewal of Miami. Disciples are formed through Missional Churches as people who are not following Jesus begin to take steps towards Christ. And disciples are grown through Missional Churches as people join God in his mission of reaching new people in different neighborhoods and networks across Miami.

A Missional Church has a very specific neighborhood or network of people that they are seeking to reach and serve with the life and love of Jesus. If there is no clear mission, then a Missional Church does not exist. We start Missional Churches in order to reach new people, not to simply gather Christians together.

Most Missional Churches will start with a small core (2-5 people) who have responded to God's call to start a Missional Church focused on a neighborhood or network of people. Our vision is for everyone in Rhythm to belong to a Missional Church by starting one or joining one and contributing to it's unique mission. (*see Appendices C - The ABC's of a Missional Church*)

We believe that intimacy with God and commitment to His mission means prioritizing both the marginalized in our city and those without knowledge of God's love. We also believe that discipleship of believers happens best and most significantly while obeying Jesus and following Him through mission — therefore, we empower believers to seek the heart of God in prayer to know their unique calling, and to find a Missional Church where they can truly live it out.

In many ways we don't consider Rhythm to be a "church", but a network of many Missional Churches who gather together weekly for Public Worship. This distinction keeps us focused on helping people discern their missional calling, and mobilizing them to start Missional Churches that reach new groups of people in Miami.

### ***Public Worship***

Public Worship is the weekly time our Missional Churches meet to pray, worship, celebrate Eucharist, and learn from the Scriptures with God and each other. This gathering of the Missional Churches happens every Sunday.

The term "liturgy" comes from the Greek word meaning "public worship," so we infuse a mixture of ancient and modern liturgy practices. One tangible way we stay connected to the worldwide Christian community is by following the sacred seasons of the Christian calendar (Advent, Lent, etc.). We also write many of our litanies, praise songs, and other elements of worship, as well as use creative expressions to immerse us in God's beauty and glory.

Our children are invited to participate in the first half of Public Worship. We deeply value being a multi-generational community and having our kids see their parents seeking Jesus alongside others.

It's important to note that we do not think Sunday morning is "church" so we call it Public Worship. This gathering of Missional Churches is designed to encourage, challenge, equip, and inspire us to live more fully in and for Jesus in the city. Public Worship is not the primary expression of living as the Body of Christ for Rhythm - Missional Churches are primary. So Public Worship exists to serve Missional Churches, not vice versa.

## **SHARED LEADERSHIP**

In the New Testament the word "leader" is generally avoided. The apostle Paul refrained from elevating himself over others and instead used terms like "co-laborer" and "coworker" (1 Corinthians 3:9; Philippians 2:25). Christian leadership is not intended to be a one-man band, with a solitary figure declaring from a pulpit or office, with everyone else as spectators. Instead the New Testament writers used the term "servant" or "service" to identify people in leadership.

When we read the New Testament we also see a consistent pattern where specific individuals and groups of people are called out and empowered to lead the community in specific ways (Acts 6:1-7; Acts 13:1-3; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). So there is a need for leadership in the church, but it always looks like humble servanthood and takes on the posture of sacrificial love.

In Rhythm, our hope is to have multiple layers of servant leadership in Rhythm. Our aim is to share the weight of leading our expression of the Body of Christ and for everyone to be empowered to play their unique part. Whenever possible we want to lead in teams, sharing the mission of God together. A shared leadership helps us embrace mutual accountability, sharing power, and relationship-based discernment.

Our leadership ecosystem is currently composed of three primary teams. \*\*\* Each of these teams seeks to honor Christ and Rhythm through the character of their lives and the competency of their leadership.

### ***Pastoral Team (PT)***

The PT leads and equips the rest of the church for ministry, service, and mission. The PT is specifically entrusted with overseeing missional initiatives and structure, leadership training and development, pastoral care, preaching and teaching, and affinity/specialized ministries.

The PT offers high-level guidance, discernment, and direction to Rhythm's communal identity and purpose, and also oversees the day-to-day implementation of our vision and mission.

The PT has a high value on sharing leadership and decision-making as a team, while also empowering each pastor to lead in their respective areas of ministry responsibility and gifting.

Each member of the PT is directly supervised by the Lead Pastor, but the GT also provides general oversight and supervision for the entire PT through their guidance and discernment. The GT directly supervises the Lead Pastor.

### ***Guidance Team (GT)***

The GT acts as the elders/overseers for Rhythm. While each of us is called to lead, disciple, and care for others in our church community, the GT is specifically entrusted with overseeing Rhythm's spiritual alignment, pastoral supervision, and organizational oversight.

The GT offers high-level guidance, discernment, and direction to Rhythm's communal identity, mission, and purpose.

It is the responsibility of the GT to identify potential GT members, and invite them into a discernment process about playing this role in the church. The discernment process is quite extensive, usually taking two to four months for each candidate, with the final confirmation coming from the Vowed Community. GT members do not have a set term, but every three years each member will go through a discernment process to determine if they should remain on the team.

### ***Vowed Community (VC)***

The VC functions as the "covenant members" of Rhythm. In the Scriptures, a covenant represented a sacred promise that was made between God and an individual (or community of people). The commitment of the VC is covenantal in nature - a significant promise to follow Jesus with the Rhythm community. The VC is specifically entrusted to act as the key stakeholders of Rhythm and participate in communal discernment as necessary.

The VC offers their time, energy, love, resources, wisdom, giftings, and passion to Rhythm's identity and purpose, specifically the ministries that they serve in and the Missional Church that they belong to.

Rhythm is an independent, non-denominational church but we are also directly networked with the larger Body of Christ. Our primary associations are with the *Ecclesia Network* ([ecclesianet.org](http://ecclesianet.org)) and the *V3 Church Planting Movement* ([thev3movement.org](http://thev3movement.org)). Both of these networks are diligently working to support, resource, and train mission leaders and churches throughout North America and have been significant allies for Rhythm in our journey.

\*\*\* It's important to note that Rhythm's leadership ecosystem has looked different over the years. As Rhythm and our clarity of purpose has evolved, so has our leadership approach and structure. And we expect it to keep evolving and shifting over the years. Our goal is to be open to the Spirit's leadership in our community, so whatever structure helps us do that we want!



## COMMITMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

In light of our shared identity, purpose, practices, theology, strategy, and leadership we hold the following seven commitments of all those who become part of the Vowed Community of Rhythm Church:

- (1) *I have or will publicly affirm my faith in Christ*** - A prerequisite to being part of the Vowed Community is being a follower of Jesus who has been baptized. If you have not been baptized, then one of our pastors would love to discuss this with you!
- (2) *I will faithfully commit my whole life to being formed in Jesus and his way*** - The first call of every disciple of Christ is to Christ himself - to know him, love him, and be formed by him. Vowed Community members commit to pursue whole-life formation in Christlikeness individually and alongside others. Practically this includes regular participation in Public Worship, pursuing emotional health, building spiritual friendships, and personalizing the communal Rhythm of Life with concrete spiritual practices.
- (3) *I will intentionally join God in his mission of making disciples in Miami*** - The second call of every disciple of Christ is to make more disciples - to participate in Christ's mission in the world. Rhythm's primary strategy for forming and growing disciples of Jesus in Miami is starting and multiplying Missional Churches (MC). Vowed Community members commit to making disciples through active participation in an MC or some other concrete way.
- (4) *I will sacrificially serve our church with my time, energy, heart, and presence*** - Servanthood is one of the primary characteristics of a disciple of Jesus. We want this to not just be a "duty" that we perform but a posture that we take towards people and our community. Vowed Community members commit to practically serve Rhythm in some way (e.g. hospitality team, Rhythm Kids, set-up/tear-down, worship team). This could take a variety of forms and change in different seasons, but joyful servanthood is significant.
- (5) *I will diligently protect the unity of Rhythm and the wider Church in Miami*** - One of the final prayers of Jesus recorded in the Bible is of him praying for his followers to be unified (John 17). The unity of God's people is beautiful when experienced, must be guarded with prayer and humility, and a key form of witness to the world. Vowed Community members commit to prioritize the unity and peace of Christ in Rhythm and the wider Church in Miami through prayer, words, and actions (see *Appendices D - Unity, Peacemaking, & Reconciliation*).
- (6) *I will generously give my financial resources to empower the ministry and mission of Rhythm*** - Financial generosity is an important discipleship issue - it is an act of worship and thanks to God, surrender and trust to Jesus, and commitment to the mission of making disciples. Vowed Community members commit to steward their financial resources so they can give 10% or more to the ministry and mission of Rhythm. Please email one of the pastors for a copy of Rhythm's current budget.
- (7) *I will consistently pray for people in Rhythm, Miami, and for God's kingdom to break in*** - Prayer and intercession are the fuel behind any kingdom movement and breakthrough. Rhythm is committed to a missional expression of the church, so we depend on the resources of God. Vowed Community members commit to lead our church towards greater intimacy with God, fervor in prayer, and spiritual power for the mission.

## REMAINING STEPS

There are two different ways to become part of the Vowed Community. First, you can join in late September/early October. The Vowed Community annually reaffirms our common vision, mission, and commitment during this time. Secondly, you can join anytime during the year, so if you connect to Rhythm in January (for example) then you don't have to wait to join the Vowed Community until the fall when we communally reaffirm this commitment.

Below are the next steps depending on when you are joining the Vowed Community.

### ***Join in late September/early October:***

Step 1      Participate in the Family Meeting lunch after Public Worship on *September 23* to hear more about Rhythm's vision, mission, and strategy.

Step 2      Confirm with one of the pastors of your final decision by *September 30*.

Step 3      Participate in the annual affirmation in Public Worship on *October 7*.

### ***Join at another time in the year:***

Step 1      Meet with one of the pastors or Guidance Team members to share your testimony, process through the Vowed Community description, and pray.

Step 2      Confirm with one of the pastors of your final decision.

Step 3      Be recognized on a Sunday morning as a new member of the Vowed Community.



## FAQ's

### ***Where did the idea of a “Rule of Life” come from?***

Following the example of many older Christian communities (particularly monastic ones), a Rule of Life is a set of shared affirmations and concrete practices that give tangible shape to the kind of life we will live together. This tradition goes back to early missionary communities like St. Patrick and the Celtic Christians, but was made famous by *The Rule of St. Benedict* around 529 A.D. Community members would first be initiated into the community through baptism and then would subscribe to a shared Rule of Life. Obviously Rhythm is not a monastery or a convent, but we do think there is something to this idea of a community committing themselves to a certain way of following Jesus together in a place.

We like the language of “rhythm” so we call it a Rhythm of Life. It helps us to think about orienting our lives around the core rhythms that formed the life of Christ.

### ***Why a “Vowed Community” instead of membership?***

From our experience, our ideas of “membership” are often weak and more like joining the country club or an online group than giving yourself to know and be known, to love and serve among a community of people. The language of “vow” gets at the biblical idea of “covenant.” In the Bible, a covenant was a sacred promise of sorts that articulates relational fidelity and commitment. Making promises and sticking to our commitments is challenging and something that many people in our culture fear and avoid. But making promises to each other is not meant to be constricting and controlling. Making promises and keeping them actually brings freedom, stability, growth, and focus in our lives and relationships. They help us depend on one another and move us out of the silo of individualism into the garden of community. When we make promises to a group of people they can keep us “on track” in the way of Jesus when other aspects of our lives may pull us away.

We’re hoping that the language and concept of a Vowed Community and Rhythm of Life will reshape our understanding of what it means to belong to a local church and share a common life and mission. Like the early Christians in Acts 2:42-47, we desire to live the way of Jesus together, with all our mess and all our hope. We have a hunch that something like a Rhythm of Life has a better chance at helping us be that sort of community rather than merely an organization.

### ***Will this create a “Varsity” and “JV” at Rhythm, where some are “better” or where there is a lot of emphasis on who is in and who is out?***

There is no “in” or “out” at Rhythm. The Vowed Community is not the group for who’s more spiritual and who’s not, but rather a clear way for people to commit themselves to one another, owning the mission of Rhythm, and to pursuing a life centered around the core rhythms of Jesus (because, as we know, the things we leave entirely to good intentions rarely actually happen). Being part of the Vowed Community doesn’t gain you power (it calls you to be a sacrificial servant), and it certainly doesn’t make you more spiritual. Rather, it is a way of practicing humility and submitting yourself to the shared life and mission of the broader community.

### ***What are some of the main theological influences for Rhythm?***

That is a big question and there's a lot that could be said! One of our favorite resources that gives a great overview of the different traditions and "streams" of the Church is *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster. Rhythm has been primarily influenced by three big streams of the Church - Anabaptism (specifically: peace-making, restorative justice, and a Jesus-centered theology); Monasticism (specifically: communal rule of life, contemplative spirituality, the Eucharist); and Missional (specifically: sharing Jesus with others, the sending nature of God, and church planting). If you'd like to learn more about any of these traditions, please let us know.

### ***What if this sounds heavy, and I'm not sure I can add a single more thing "to do"?***

Maybe you don't need to join the Vowed Community - or maybe wait for another time. Or maybe dig into why it feels burdensome or why you're hesitant to commit yourself to a community. Talk it out with someone else to see if there couldn't be a way that this might be freeing and rich for you. If this whole thing strikes you as just more work or some added moralistic duty to add to your already overtaxed life, then don't do it. That's not the spirit or intention, and we applaud you for refusing to load yourself up with guilt or life-draining duty.

In all this, we've struggled with the tension of having this process seem burdensome or complex or (in reaction) acting as though joining a community really doesn't ask much of us. We're trying to restore some of the integrity of what it means to belong to a local church. We think the Gospel calls us out of ourselves and past our comfort zones. At the same time, God invites us to the "unforced rhythms of grace" (Matthew 11:30). That means our life in God should never be forced nor motivated by guilt, but instead led by the Spirit and saturated in God's grace.

### ***Do I need to join the Vowed Community to be a part of Rhythm?***

No. If you want to be a part, you are a part. Joining the Vowed Community is for those who feel called to take a deeper level of commitment to our shared values, mission, and vision.

### ***What if I'm a college student and will be away for the summer?***

If you feel called to be part of the Vowed Community, then we want you to, even if you'll be away for the summer. Our community has people in all stages and seasons of life. We want this layer of commitment to be accessible to everyone, regardless of their work or school situation. If you're a college student and will be gone for the summer (or have a job that requires a lot of travel), we hope the Rhythm of Life serves as a guide for faithful living while you're away. We also encourage you to find a local church there so you can continue to live the way of Jesus with others. Know that you have a community in Miami praying for you while you're gone and waiting to welcome you when you return.

### ***Do I need to be baptized before I join the Vowed Community?***

Baptism is a rite of passage that we cherish because not only is it a way of "going public" with your faith, it's also the way we initiate new followers of Christ into our family. So it would be a bit out of order for someone to become part of the Vowed Community (which is a firm commitment to follow Jesus with Rhythm) if they have not yet been initiated into the Christian family by baptism. However, we think these things can happen together. If you desire to join the Vowed Community and have never been baptized, we encourage you to do both. Come talk to one of our pastors or one of our Guidance Team members about how this can happen. We'll walk with you every step of the way.

***Why is this something we reaffirm every year?***

The Vowed Community reaffirms its commitment to following Jesus with Rhythm on an annual basis because it gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we're doing with living out the commitments we've made to God, one another, and our city. It also allows us to pray about, think through, and consider what we're committing ourselves to for the next year. In short, renewing this every year helps us to take it seriously.

***What if I'm not ready to make this commitment right now?***

No problem. Come be part of us. Roll up your sleeves and join in wherever you want. And if at some point along the way you want to reconsider joining the Vowed Community, let us know because we would love to have that conversation with you.

## **Appendices A - Rhythm of Life Guide**

Below is a fuller explanation of the Rhythm of Life, along with descriptions of the core rhythms and practices that we're committing to as a community. We've also listed the biblical passages that inform each of the four vows. This is meant to be a framework for freedom, providing healthy boundaries while leaving plenty of room for flexibility and personalization.

### **✠ Rhythm of Worship**

**Jesus cultivated a lifestyle of worship and communion with God.**

**Jesus has pursued us with his relentless love so that we may experience his presence, intimacy, care, and wholeness. We recognize the temptation to wander after alternative loves, but choose instead to embrace Jesus and love him with our whole heart.**

**Because God is to be worshipped and treasured above all things, we commit to loving God in all aspects of our life, and pursuing Him individually and communally through spiritual practices and holy habits including prayer, scripture, and sabbath rest.**

*(Psalm 29:2; Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Ephesians 5:19-20; Exodus 31:12-13)*

**Prayer.** Prayer is our communication with God. That means it's the most important part of our life. We set aside time daily to meet with God in prayer and to dwell in His presence. We embrace many forms of prayer including spontaneous prayer, fixed-hour prayer (the Divine Hours), journaling, prayer walks, and centering prayer.

**Scripture.** God's Word is sweeter than honey and a lamp unto our feet. In other words, it is our food and primary means of revelation from Him. We spend time each day in Scripture, seeking God's face and listening to His voice. Maturing in Christ requires a life where we read, memorize, meditate, enjoy, study, and obey God's Word.

**Sabbath.** Each week we set aside a 24-hour period for sabbath rest, structuring our time around prayer and play. This is a day to slow down, contemplate God's goodness, and be reminded that God is the one who cares and provides for us. If our schedule allows, we practice this on Sundays so we can gather with others to be refreshed through worship and built up as the body of Christ.

### **✠ Rhythm of Mission**

**Jesus cultivated a lifestyle of mission and restoration in this world.**

**Jesus has called us to live as sent people in this city, extending his good news to everyone we meet, but especially with the poor and vulnerable. We recognize the temptation to focus entirely on ourselves and those who are like us, but choose instead to embrace the people and pain of our city.**

**Because God's desire is to bring His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, we commit to being on mission with God by practicing faithful presence in the city, working for restorative justice and renewal, and sharing the good news of the gospel with others.**

*(Matthew 6:33; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9; Jeremiah 29:7)*

**Presence.** We believe that God is at work in people and places. Disciples of Jesus are “sent ones” but we do not go alone because God is already at work. Our calling is not to bring Jesus to people, but to be faithfully present to the work that God is already doing in people, helping them to take steps towards God’s kingdom. We engage in presence by consistently showing up in nonChristian environments, building relationships with nonChristians, and discerning how the Spirit is at work.

**Justice.** God loves Miami and so do we. Because we care about the good of the whole city, not just of those in our own tribe, we engage in issues that matter to our city and join others in working for the common good. We find tangible, concrete ways to extend God’s kingdom and compassion to our poor and marginalized neighbors. We recognize that Miami is filled with both beauty and brokenness, and we are sent into the city to labor for it’s holistic healing.

**Gospel.** We point others to a deep, personal relationship with Jesus. The coming of Christ is both the culmination of Israel’s story and the greatest news in the world. Our aim is to make this good news known, always with humility and love, to nonChristian people in Miami. We value building relationships with nonChristians because Jesus deeply loves them and desires for all people to experience his abundant life.

## ✠ Rhythm of Surrender

**Jesus cultivated a lifestyle of surrender and trust in his Father.**

**Jesus has invited us to stop trying to control our lives or the lives of others, and to let him lead us into freedom, joy, and healing. We recognize the temptation to grasp for control in a power-hungry society, but choose instead to embrace humble obedience to Jesus.**

**Because Jesus is Lord, we commit to surrendering to Him in all areas of life including our money, our sexuality, and our power, and to showing our city how money, sex, and power can be used in life-giving ways.**

*(Mark 10:6-12, 21-27, 42-44; Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 5:8-10; 1 Corinthians 10:31)*

**Money.** We manage our material resources in a manner that honors God (e.g. giving a percentage of our income to the mission and ministry of Rhythm, sharing with others who have needs, etc) and avoids the traps and enticements of Western culture (e.g. bad debt, conspicuous consumption, gambling, etc). We want our lifestyle to show that we serve God and not money.

**Sex.** We avoid both secular society’s idolization of sex and traditional society’s fear of sex. We pursue purity in our relationships and private life, and reserve sexual expression for the covenant relationship of marriage. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life patterns are different from ours.

**Power.** We are committed to power sharing and to dissolving the divisions of race, culture, social class, and gender among us. We see people as ends in themselves, never as means to ends. We go about our daily life remembering we are in Miami not to be served but to serve.

## ✠ Rhythm of Community

Jesus cultivated a lifestyle of community and togetherness with others.

Jesus has formed us into a new family so that his powerful love can be seen and displayed through our love for one another. We recognize the temptation to live isolated and individualized lives, but choose instead to embrace a common way of life together.

Because the Trinity binds us together in community, we commit to doing life together, pursuing spiritual friendship with one another, and reconciling in a way that honors Christ and each other.

*(Ephesians 4:2-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Acts 4:32-35; James 5:16; Matthew 18:15; 1 Peter 4:9)*

**Togetherness.** God intends for us to live deeply with one another, to not merely attend Rhythm but to belong. We do this by making room for each other in our lives and striving to walk together in intimacy and authenticity. Our goal is to see ourselves as a family, and to be connected in such a way that we feel the joys and sorrows of one another.

**Friendship.** We seek out a spiritual friend in the community that we can regularly share and pray with about the details of our life. This relationship is built on mutual encouragement, and we invite this person to hold us accountable to living the way of Jesus and give them permission to speak truth into our life. When we do this for them, we do it with lots of grace.

**Reconciliation.** We resolve the inevitable relational conflicts that arise within community life in a way that honors Christ and one another. This involves listening well, clarifying assumptions and expectations, admitting our own brokenness, and moving toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Whether someone has wronged us or we've wronged them, we go to that person rather than going to others.

## ***Appendices B - The Story of Scripture***

The Bible is made up of many different books, letters, poems, and narratives but is one whole, comprehensive story. Understanding the overarching story of Scripture - the meta narrative of the Bible is extremely important. When we understand the whole story of God we start to realize that this is a living story - it's still unfolding and we get drawn into the story and find that we have an important part to play. Think about this meta-narrative being like a six-act play.

### ***Act 1 - Creation (God Establishes His Kingdom)***

The curtain opens on the Biblical drama—its first act is God's creation of the universe. As a supreme ruler, God calls all things into being by His sovereign decree. Each creature plays a part in this grand symphony of creation, and every part is declared "good." God's creative work climaxes in His creation of human beings to be like himself and to rule the world as His stewards. These first human beings, Adam and Eve, enjoy warm and close fellowship with God in the garden as they carry out their task of looking after the world, delighting in and developing its rich potentials, and thanking God. By the end of the first act, the curtain closes on a 'very good' world.

### ***Act 2 - Fall (Rebellion in the Kingdom)***

Bright anticipation characterizes the opening of act two. God gives Adam and Eve everything they need; their lives are rich and full as they delight in God and the gifts He has given. God places one restriction on them: they are not to eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden or everything will be ruined. By submitting to God's word, Adam and Eve learn the joy of living as trustful and dependent creatures. But Satan offers another word, a lie, by which Adam and Eve can live. In a tragic twist, they listen to the lie of Satan and contravene God's command.

This treasonous act of rebellion sends shock-waves throughout the whole creation. Adam's and Eve's rebellion corrupts the warm friendship they had enjoyed with God as they walked together in the garden, delighting in God's presence and gifts. They find themselves estranged from God and hide from His presence. Their revolt also damages relations between human beings. Adam's and Eve's relationship to each other becomes one of selfish mastery. The effects are soon seen as their son Cain murders his brother, Abel, and as violence and evil spreads among the earth's growing population. Their apostasy further ravages the harmonious relationship enjoyed previously between humanity and the non-human creation. Every relationship and every part of human life is now defiled by their betrayal. Already, even death has entered the world. As the curtain closes on the second act, Adam and Eve are in the middle of a mess. The whole world is now befouled by their rebellion.

### ***Act 3 - Israel (A People for the King)***

As the curtain rises in act three, one burning question remains: how will God respond to a world that has chosen to go its own way and that continues to ignore his good plans? To start, God brings judgement; He expels Adam and Eve from the garden. But God also brings hope when He promises to crush all the evil forces that Adam and Eve have unleashed in their foolish mutiny (Gen. 3:15). The next few millennia, recorded for us in a few brief chapters (Gen. 3-11), are the story of two interwoven developments: the increasing darkness of sin and God's faithfulness to His promise to banish that darkness.

In spite of human rebellion, God does not abandon His plans for His world. About two thousand years before Jesus, God sets into motion a plan that will lead to the recovery of the world. This promised plan has two parts: First, out of this mass of rebellious humanity, God will choose one man (Josh. 24:2). God will make this man into a great nation and give that nation a land and bless them. Second, God will extend that blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 18:18).

Over the course of Israel's long history, there are times when they are faithful to God and offer his light to the nations of the world. But more often than not, Israel runs from God and pursues their own way, just like Adam and Eve. Far from being a showcase to the nations, God's people push his patience to the point at which He expels them from the land. God seeks to halt their deadly course by raising up prophets to call them back to repentance. Through these prophets, God promises that if Israel will return to him He will be gracious and continue to work with them. He also warns that if Israel continues to rebel He will bring judgement and finally send them into exile. As Israel's situation becomes more incurable, the prophets promise that God has not given up. In fact, He promises He will send a future king who will usher in a reign of peace and justice. As the curtain closes on the third act, Israel has failed to carry out the task God gave them, but hope remains because of the faithful promises of God.

#### **Act 4 - Jesus (*The Coming of the Kingdom*)**

Into this setting of feverish anticipation for God's kingdom steps a young Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth. He announces the kingdom has come—in him! God is now acting in love and power to restore the creation and humanity to live again under the kind rule of God, the way God designed it all in the beginning. Jesus, however, is not the kind of king Israel is expecting. He is not the freedom fighter who will throw off the Roman yoke and make Israel great again. In fact, he seems more like a wandering teacher or prophet. Jesus goes about gathering a small community of insignificant followers around him and calls them the new vanguard of God's coming new world. God's power to restore is evident as Jesus heals people and frees them from evil spirits. His invitation extends beyond the 'washed' and acceptable: he welcomes religious and social outcasts into his new community. As he challenges the customs and expectations of the day, he arouses growing opposition among the leaders. Jesus teaches his followers to live lives steeped in love, forgiveness, and righteousness. The kingdom is coming, not by destroying your enemies but by loving them, not by using force but by suffering, not by revenging but by forgiving, not by retreating from the 'unwashed' but by compassionately involving yourselves in their lives.

But the majority of Jesus' fellow Jews do not recognize him. Opposition to his work mounts until they arrest him, put him on a mock trial, and take him to the Roman governor for execution. Jesus is handed over to suffer the most appalling of all deaths— Roman crucifixion. Surely no king would die such a disgraceful death! Yet his followers declare weeks later that it is at that very moment—in the shame and pain of the cross— that God accomplishes his plan to recover his lost and broken world. Here Jesus takes the sin and brokenness of the world on himself so that the world might be healed. He dies, nailed to a cross, to take the punishment that a guilty humanity rightly deserves. It is now possible for the world, and all people in it, to be made right with God.

How can his followers make such a preposterous claim? Because of the resurrection! They believe Jesus walked out of the grave and is alive from the dead. What astonishing news! His resurrection is the sign of his victory over evil; it is the first evidence of a new world dawning. But before that new world comes fully Jesus gathers his followers and gives them a task: 'You are to continue doing what you saw me doing' (John 20:21). 'You are to make known God's coming rule in your lives, your deeds and your words. God's new world will come in time. But until then, announce its coming and show by the way you live that it is a reality. I limited my work,' Jesus says, 'to Israel. Now you are to spread this good news of God's coming world through the whole world.' The fourth act ends with Jesus taking his rightful throne, in heaven at the right hand of God.

#### **Act 5 - Church (*Spreading the News of the Kingdom*)**

The book of Acts begins with the sudden and explosive coming of the Holy Spirit, whose coming the prophets and Jesus, himself, had promised (Acts 2). He comes, intent on bringing the new life of God's kingdom to all who turn from sin, believe renewal has come in Jesus, and are baptized into the emerging kingdom community. This new community is established and commits itself to doing those things that

God promises to use to renew in them the life of the resurrection: the Word of God, prayer, fellowship with one another, and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). As they do this, the life of God's kingdom more and more shows itself in Jerusalem, and the church begins to grow. The church spreads from Jerusalem to Judea and into Samaria. Then a new hub is established in Antioch (Acts 11:19-28). The church at Antioch catches a vision for taking this good news to places where it has not been heard. And so they commission two men, Paul and Barnabas, for this task (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul plays a huge role in the spread of the good news throughout the Roman Empire. He was once a militant enemy of the church, but a dramatic encounter with Jesus turns him into a leading missionary to the non-Jewish world. He dedicates his life to traveling throughout the Roman Empire, starting new churches and writing letters to these young Jesus communities to encourage them and instruct them about how to live as followers of the risen Jesus. These letters, along with others, eventually are collected into the New Testament. Each of these letters continues today, in the twenty-first century, to give valuable instruction on what to believe about the good news and how to live faithfully under God's rule in our daily lives. The book of Acts ends with Paul being transported to Rome and living there under house arrest. Not a very satisfying ending to a dramatic story of the spread of the gospel! But Acts ends without finality for a reason. The story is not finished. It must continue to unfold until Jesus returns again.

This is our place in the story! The story of God's people, growing in numbers and gathering from every nation into one community, has continued for 2,000 years, and it continues today. Any who hear the call of Jesus to follow him must center their lives in him and commit themselves to living the life of God's kingdom. Faith in Jesus brings the gift of the Spirit, a foretaste of the full kingdom meal that is yet to come. To use a different metaphor, the church is now a preview of the coming kingdom. The church picks up Israel's task of being a showcase of what God intends for human life (Ex. 19:3-6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-12). The church is to continue the kingdom mission that Jesus began among the Jews, a kingdom established now among all the people of the earth. The mission of God's people is to make known the good news of the kingdom. And since the rule of Jesus covers the whole earth, the mission of God's people is as broad as creation. In effect, God's people are to live lives that say, 'This is how the whole world will be some day when Jesus returns!'

### **Act 6 - New Creation (*The Return of the King*)**

Jesus promised that one day he would return and complete the work he had begun. And so his people live in the confident expectation that every challenge to his loving rule will be crushed and that the His kingdom will come fully. When he returns, the dead will be raised and all people will appear before him in judgement. God's opponents will be overthrown, earth and heaven will be renewed, and God's rule will be complete.

The last book in the Bible is Revelation. In that book John is ushered into God's throne room to see how things really are. He is shown that, whatever evidence exists to the contrary, Jesus, whom the church follows, is in control of world events. He is moving history toward its appointed end. At that end, the old world dominated by evil, pain, suffering, and death will be overthrown. God will again dwell among humanity as He did in the beginning. He will wipe away tears. There will be no more death, mourning, pain, suffering, or evil. With joy, those of us who have followed this story anticipate hearing God's own voice: 'I am making everything new!' (Rev. 21:5) The marvelous imagery of the last chapters of Revelation directs the reader's gaze to the end of history and to the restoration of the whole of God's creation. He invites all the thirsty to come even now and to drink the waters of life but warns all those who remain outside the kingdom. The Bible ends with a promise repeated three times—'I am coming soon' (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). And we echo the response of the author of Revelation: 'Yes! Come Lord Jesus.' \*\*\*

\*\*\* Adapted from *The Story-line of the Bible* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen

## ***Appendices C - The ABC's of a Missional Church***

Rhythm is a network of missional disciples, joining God's restoration project in Miami. Our heart is to see the kingdom of God flourish and multiply all over Miami, into every person and place in the city that does not currently know Jesus. We believe that every follower of Christ has a missional calling and dream inside of them that needs to be discerned, awakened, empowered, and actualized. We start and multiply Missional Churches (MC) across Miami as tangible expressions of these missional callings and dreams.

An MC is extremely simple in structure, but robust in vision and practice. These are the core elements:

- **A clear missional focus** - We organize around mission, reaching people who are not connected to Christ and/or his church. Normally this will be around a specific neighborhood or network of people.
- **A core of 2-5 people** - Each MC needs to have a core group of people who embrace the mission together. Jesus sent out his disciples in teams, so we do too.
- **Rhythms of gathering and scattering** - Each MC will discern and develop consistent rhythms of gathering (coming together to pray, eat, worship, care for each other, strategize, etc) and scattering (building relationships in the neighborhood/network, serving the missional context, spending time with people of peace, etc). These rhythms will likely shift over time.
- **Culture of safety and stretching** - Disciples grow when both safety and stretching exist together. If there is only safety then people feel loved, cared for, and known but likely won't grow because there is no challenge to move into something uncomfortable or unfamiliar. If there is only stretching then people will be challenged, but likely will become exhausted because there is a lack of relational connection and care. Jesus offered both to his disciples and we want to as well.
- **A vision and heart to multiply** - There is no specific timetable on this, but our goal is to empower people to live on mission with others and start MCs across the city. Each MC values multiplication and empowering people to discern their missional calling over time.

Our dream is for everyone in Rhythm to belong to a Missional Church by starting a new one or joining one that already exists and contributing to its unique mission. These are the four beginning steps to starting a Missional Church:

- 1) **DISCERN** a calling to a neighborhood or network of people
- 2) **RECRUIT** a core team to live on mission with you
- 3) **EXPERIMENT** with rhythms of gathering and scattering
- 4) **IDENTIFY** people of peace in the neighborhood or network

Each of the MC leaders and cores receive ongoing coaching and training. Talk with one of the pastors or Guidance Team members to learn more about getting involved with a Missional Church or starting one!

## ***Appendices D - Unity, Peacemaking, and Reconciliation***

Our church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled through the sacrifice of his only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

We understand that conflict is inevitable and our goal is not to be “conflict-free.” Our goal is to seek the presence of Christ in the midst of conflict, experience his renewal, and offer a witness to the world of the peaceable kingdom of God.

Therefore, out of love for Christ and in reliance on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we are committed to resolving our differences according to the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

### ***Personal Peacemaking***

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong. This means we first examine ourselves and determine if we are guilty of the same offense or are contributors of the other’s offense (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We identify our personal “triggers”, including our temptation to engage with conflict in unhealthy ways, and the ways our family-of-origin approached conflict and reconciliation (Matt. 1:1-14).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7; see [peacemaker.net/charitable\\_judgments](http://peacemaker.net/charitable_judgments)).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than belittling them (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- As we seek to resolve differences with others, we will look out for their concerns and interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as freely and fully as God has forgiven us so that we might glorify God’s reconciling grace (Eph. 4:32).

### ***Assisted Peacemaking***

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, whether it’s personal or has church, business, or even legal implications, we will seek assistance from our church leaders or wise people they appoint, and we will listen humbly to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 6:1-8). If our conflict is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.

- If we have a conflict with a person who attends another church, we will make a good faith effort to cooperate with our church leaders as they offer to work with the leaders of the other church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will assist him in seeking to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- If we have a dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration.

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know his infinite love and peace. \*\*\*

\*\*\* Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide for Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande