

## **FOG General Overview**

Welcome to the Friends of Grace (FOG) Homeschool Co-op!

Our Co-op is a ministry of the Friends of Grace homeschool support group, which has been serving the Chelmsford and Lowell area since 1991. In 2007, we began the co-op group you are visiting today. The size and geographical dispersion of our group has increased dramatically since starting this outreach. Currently there are about 70 families and 190 people meeting here each week for Co-op. We're still just a group of Christian homeschooling parents, though, striving to encourage one another as we teach our children to the best of our abilities.

We are blessed to use the lovely facility here at Immanuel Church, though most members worship at a variety of Christian churches throughout the area. We do have a statement of faith that we ask members to sign when joining our group, which affirms that we refer to God's message through the Bible for our ultimate authority in all matters.

### **FOG Homeschool Co-op Overview:**

Co-op classes meet for 24 weeks between September and April; we take the holiday season from Thanksgiving through December off, and observe Massachusetts February break as well. If Good Friday falls during our class weeks, we also do not meet on that day.

We run three hours of classes on Friday mornings each week. Grades 1-12 have class selections, while kindergarten and younger children have programs or childcare that keep them together as a group all morning. Your oldest child needs to be at least kindergarten age (5 before August 1st) to join our co-op. Arrival is 8:45-9:00 each week; we have a morning assembly in the gym at 9:15, and classes begin at 9:30. Each class runs for 55 minutes, and there is a 10 minute snack break between the first two classes from 10:25-10:35. Due to some severe allergies within our group and in church membership, no products containing nuts are allowed in the church building, so keep snacks nut-free. Dismissal is at 12:30, and families try to clear the building quickly so that our rotating schedule of cleaning volunteers can make sure things are in good shape.

Our course selection varies each year because we offer whatever classes our parent teachers choose to lead. All of our teachers have a direct connection to our Co-op in some way. Most are parents, though we have had a few grandparents and "homeschooler emeritus" parents (whose children have graduated) also bless us with their time. The teachers in our co-operative are all volunteers; we do not charge tuition fees for our classes. We do charge supply fees for most classes, and there are also often required supply lists. New families must attend for at least one full Co-op year before volunteering to teach. We run CORI background checks on all adults who attend our Co-op each year, in an effort to be diligent about the safety of our children.

The amount of homework also varies by class, and time estimates are included with the course descriptions so families can budget time in their lesson plans to complete work at home. It is extremely helpful to Co-op teachers when students come to class prepared; one hour a week

is not a complete course for many subjects! Please consider homework loads and your family's purposes for attending Co-op when making your course selections.

We are a weekly co-operative of homeschooling families, not a drop-off set of classes, and as such all of our parents are vital to the smooth running of the courses. Parents and students must stay at the church for the entire morning each week, and all parents have assigned helping positions during at least two hours of the morning. The remaining, third hour is considered a "float" hour; depending on the week, a parent might have the hour off, or our volunteer coordinators may assign him or her to help in a classroom to fill absences. We strive to keep 2-3 adults in each classroom each week. Helpers support the lead teacher by keeping order among students when needed, assisting with projects, and occasionally executing lesson plans if the teacher needs to be absent. If you elect to join our Co-op, please honor your commitment. Come ready to work each week, and make any outside appointments for after 12:30 on Fridays.

Required materials and supply fees are listed in our course descriptions, which are published in May each year a few weeks prior to our June registration night. Fees typically range from \$5-\$100, depending on the type of class and materials the teacher will need to purchase. Specific books or texts to be purchased separately are also required for some classes. There is also a Co-op fee (currently \$275/family), which includes support group membership for the year and covers administrative and building use costs for our Co-op. All fees are due at the time of registration, unless prior arrangements have been made with Heather Black, the Co-op Administrator.

Our registration is divided into two nights. For 2026-'27 co-op year, returning families will register Monday, June 1<sup>st</sup> and new families are to register on Thursday, June 4. This schedule allows us to address any significant class discrepancies and to inform you of classes that have already filled prior to new family registration. New families, and even many returning families, need to have 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> class choices for their children planned in the event that their first-choice classes fill; our classrooms are only so big! Registration is an in-person process. Friends may not register on your behalf. You may send materials with a spouse, but we'll need to coordinate a CORI check at some point.

Thus far, we have never needed to turn away any new families on Registration Night. We hope and pray that legacy continues but cannot guarantee anything prior to the process. A full schedule for registration will be sent with the course descriptions and registration materials in May. In the event an absentee registration is needed, registration materials, including alternative class choices, need to be sent to the Co-op Administrator in advance, and that registration will be carried through the line at the end of its registration group.

### **Friends of Grace Support Group:**

There are some other interesting opportunities within the Friends of Grace Support Group beyond our Friday Co-op. We maintain an active website for our group, which includes a calendar of events, contact information for member families, pictures of activities, and several active forums for discussion and announcements. Field trip opportunities are often scheduled by various families through the year, as well as some group events; we've had a couple of cookout and pool parties at the beginning of the school year, and we've also held year-end picnics.

Additionally, there is a monthly “Freebie Day,” where families can share things they no longer use. Everyone is welcome to share their gifts and interests to make our support group a blessing to homeschooling families.

Moms encourage each other throughout the year with personal relationships and fellowship times. Our ultimate goal is to support one another in this journey of discipling our children. If you would like to join the support group, it is \$10.61 a year (or \$10 cash/check) which helps to pay for the website and some other expenses. Joining will give you access to all the information about Co-op and any other activities you may want to join.

Our support group now also offers an app. The app syncs with our website to provide easier access to the calendar, conversations, family directory, etc. without the need to log in every time. You may also choose to enable notification alerts. This is the best way to stay connected and receive alerts about official announcements, such as registration updates and snow closures.

**APP Install steps:**

1. Once you are a member, log in to the website using your phone: <https://www.friendsofgrace.net>
2. At the top of the page, click the phone icon (the app install button).
3. Look for your device type (Apple or Android) and follow the install steps shown on your screen. (You may rename the bookmark from ‘HSL Connect’ to ‘Friends of Grace’ or ‘FoG’ before saving it.)
4. The app should now appear on your phone just like any other app.
5. Log in and turn on notifications, if so desired (look for gear icon on upper right side of screen). Do note that notifications will not work if you have that setting off in your phone’s general settings.

Friends of Grace is a support group registered with our state homeschooling organization, MassHOPE: Massachusetts Homeschool Organization of Parent Educators. This affiliation includes a discount for membership in HSLDA, Homeschool Legal Defense Association, which is recommended for all homeschooling families. [www.hsllda.org](http://www.hsllda.org) MassHOPE also sponsors an annual homeschooling convention in Sturbridge, where many speakers hold workshops and curriculum vendors gather to display their offerings. Registration and convention details are available now at [www.masshope.org](http://www.masshope.org).

***More detailed information is found in the FoG Handbook!***