

# Fatherhood-Family Initiative Q & A

*What is your goal?*

The immediate goal is to bring fathers and sons together and bring into the son's life the stabilizing influence of the father. The long-term goal is to restore the role of the father and thereby strengthen the family.

*Who is running this?*

FFI was developed by the Masonic Community Center Foundation. The Masons have a long and distinguished tradition of local community service, including founding and running the Omaha Home for Boys. FFI is the newest in a legacy of community improvement projects championed by the Masons.

The local Prince Hall Masons also are leading this effort. Prince Hall Masonry began with its namesake, Prince Hall, who founded the initial African Lodge in America during the revolutionary era. The leadership of today's Omaha Prince Hall Masons is vital to this project.

*How will you do this?*

The strategy is to develop programs to provide the possibility of assessment of the personal needs of the participants and opportunities to help meet those needs using the resources of the Masonic fraternity together with referrals to and partnerships with other community resources when appropriate. Our core activity is the Home Team Sports Club.

*Are you running a sports league?*

No. It's informal and recreational. We are starting with basketball. Sports is our vehicle for fellowship. We'll have a short meeting and then start playing basketball. The basketball is optional, though we hope to see lots of father-son units working out and having fun.

*How often does this happen?*

Once a week starting September 15.

*Where do you meet?*

The Jesuit Middle School of Omaha, which is located at the original site of the Butler-Gast YMCA at 22nd and Grant Streets. We are grateful to Jesuit and think it's a natural fit given Jesuit's mission of producing young men who will grow up to be leaders strong in character as well as intellect.

*Are there age limits?*

Yes. We start with fourth graders and end with seniors in high school. The son will "age out" of the program after high school. We recruit father-son units by grade levels in three tiers and have three shifts on a Wednesday nights from 7 to 10: grades 4-6 for the first hour, grades 7-9 for the second hour, and grades 10-12 for the third hour. This gives fathers and sons time to finish school or work and eat dinner. It gives sons a chance to handle homework and other responsibilities on a school night.

*Are you worried about security?*

No. Participants have to fill out a membership form and pay a \$5 annual fee. FFI will issue a photo I.D. We will know who is participating. And we'll have the stabilizing influence of the fathers to help keep things in line.

*The Masons are leading this program but your venue is a Catholic school. Isn't there friction between the Masons and the Catholic Church?*

This cause brings together people and organizations of all faiths, races, ethnicities, politics, and other categories. The need for strong fathers is universal. This project springs from the Masonic passion for community

service, but participants and supporters do not have to become Masons. The Masons welcome the partnership of all people and organizations to help make FFI a success.

*How are you funded?*

FFI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization funded by the generosity of donors.

*Aren't you duplicating the work of other organizations involved in North Omaha?*

No. Our focus and message are unique. No one is saying exactly what we are saying. No one is doing exactly what we are doing. Our program is another part of the solution to the poverty and violence so much in the news. But our program is different because no matter how much money and effort are poured into education and job training and other programs, the problems targeted by such programs will still exist 20 years from now unless the role of the father is restored in the formation of children, especially boys.

*What if a boy wants to participate but does not have a father in his life?*

The father figure need not be the biological or legal father. It could be any male figure in the boy's life. But it must be the same person, not a rotation. There must be a relationship that is helping the boy become a responsible man. Perhaps it goes without saying that it must be a positive figure, not a gang leader or other negative influence.

*Aren't Big Brothers and TeamMates and other mentoring programs doing this?*

FFI is more intensely focused on fatherhood. If a Big Brother or a TeamMates mentor is the father figure in a boy's life, FFI could become part of their routine. FFI welcomes such collaboration.

*Your materials refer to vocational training and life skills and counseling and legal aid. Are you providing these services?*

No. As we get to know our participants and discover what they might need to strengthen the father-son bond and move forward in life, we will refer them to qualified service providers. Maybe it's a father with challenges to overcome. Maybe a father wants to help a son deal with a problem or develop skills for manhood. FFI will help them find what they need.

*No mothers? No daughters? No girls allowed?*

There may be special events for the entire family, but the focus is the father-son relationship. The immediate need is for men to be fathers to their sons, to show young men what it means to exercise fatherly maturity and responsibility. No mother-son substitutions. No father-daughter units. We understand that daughters need their fathers in their lives, but there is also a practical consideration. If girls are involved, the father-son focus will be lost. Boys and girls will be more interested in relationships with each other than with their fathers.