**“Saving Jamaica one Family at a Time, 2015-2017**

Dave Gosse, National Christian Education Director

1. Rationale for Programme

Dr. Ralph Thomson, veteran educator and education advocate, writing in The Sunday Gleaner of April 10, 2011, comments on the declining standard of family life in Jamaica. He states:

The Jamaican society has been experiencing a steady decline in the standard of family life and this is having far-reaching effects not only on the academic achievement of children, but on their total behaviour. The problem stems from the absence of a nuclear family, which he says is critical for the early stages of a child's development. An increasing number of sibling, visiting relationship and single parent families have replaced the original family structures. As is expected, these new family types lack the support and assistance in parenting and cultural socialization, which were traditionally present in the nuclear and extended family

Many single-parent households in Jamaica face specific social and economic challenges for both the parent and the children. About 45 per cent of all Jamaican households are female headed. Female-headed households, according to 2002 data from the Planning Institute of Jamaica, also have a larger number of children and adult females, but have a lower per capita consumption than those headed by males.

Princeton university sociologist, Sara McLanahan, also comments that children from Single Parent homes where fathers are absent manifest a number of internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, including sadness and depression, delinquency, aggression, sex role difficulties, early initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy, as well as poor social and adaptive functioning and low self-esteem.

The CEO of Family Life Ministries, Dr Barry Davidson, in his research on single parent homes agrees with McLanahan and comments that children from father-absent homes score lower on the IQ scale than the father-present child, which might make the difference between primary school and high school or high school and university. Davidson argues that children brought up under pro-longed father absence were different in mathematical skills and lower in verbal skills. Many crimes are committed by boys who believe they are omnipotent because they never had their fathers' limiting restraining influence.

In addition to the prominence of Single Parenting the current views by Jamaicans regarding the institution of marriage is even more disturbing. Jamaicans now believe that marriages are no longer the accepted route to the rearing and development of children. As such, the institution of marriage as one of the hallmark of the family is under immense attack.

Esther Tyson, writing in an August 2, 2009, edition of the Sunday Gleaner notes that form recent surveys, “at least five out of every six births in Jamaica are to unmarried mothers." Furthermore, "Jamaican women seem to have rejected marriage as the path to motherhood and are quite comfortable having children outside of marriages." This, of course, has implications for the rearing and development of our children as the quality of life in a nation is linked directly to the state of family life in our country. There is an urgent need for Jamaicans to understand the necessity of a stable family environment for the nurturing and wholesome upbringing of our children. The church ought to find it disturbing that many jamaican women were opting to be single mothers. They have divorced parenting from marriage and simply see men as sperm donors.

Given these disturbing realities the Church of God in Jamaica Reformation Movement has to remain committed to a thorough and more sustained programme of family life in Jamaica. It has to go beyond the regular weekly or monthly Family Life programe. It should institute a yearly programme which in itself is part of three year cycle of family life activities.

The three year family life programme could be dubbed, **“Saving Jamaica One Family at a Time”** and it would be rolled out in the following yearly cycle as follows:

**Year One, 2015 – Strengthening the Christian Family Institutionally**

**Year Two, 2016 - Reaching out and Strengthening the Jamaican Family**

**Year Three, 2017 – Empowering the Jamaican Family legally and Legislatively**

11**. The Philosophy of the programme.**

Each of the churches across the island affiliated with our denomination should serve as the basic Family Life Center beginning in 2015 in our respected communities. A Sunday evening every month, preferably a set Sunday, should be set aside solely for the carrying out of a family life activity. **Secondly**, the programme should be so structured that it covers all members of the local church on the one hand (from youth to the elderly). It should also be age-group specific on the other hand that it meets the needs of our members. The programme should be so flexible that churches with less members and with fewer groups would still be able to adopt the schedule and localize it for their context. An example of such a programme on a specific month is as follows.

Example One:

***Family Night October 19, 2014, Whitfield Town COG***

Topics for Discussion Age Groups

Principles in Choosing A Mate Youths

Cherishing Your Spouse Married, 35-59

Developing Networking Skills Professionals 25-40

Enduring or Enjoying Singleness Singles, 35—59

Saving Money on Daily Expenses Elderly, 60 & Up

6: 30pm Sharp. Be There and Bring A Friend

**111:**  **Outline of Possible programmes for 2015**

**January 2015: Theme: Building Healthy Families**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

Understanding God's Sacred Design for Sex Youths

Play & Recreation in Enhancing Marriages Married, 35-59

Understanding God's Sacred Design for Sex Professionals 25-40

Understanding God's Sacred Design for Sex Singles, 35—59

Healthy Eating Habits Elderly, 60 & Up

**February 2015: Theme: Black History and Heritage**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

Loving my Black Kinky hair & Skin Youths

Building A Strong Family Altar Married, 35-59

Outstanding Black Entrepreneurs Professionals 25-40

The Black Woman as Queen Singles, 35—59

The Power of the Black Extended Family Elderly, 60 & Up

**March 2015: Children - A Heritage from the Lord**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

Healing Childhood Traumas Youths

Loving Your Children for Who They Are Married, 35-59

Healing Childhood Traumas Professionals 25-40

Adopting and Fostering Children Singles, 35—59

Adopting and Fostering Children Elderly, 60 & Up

**April 2015: Enjoying and Celebrating the Family**

The entire family meets in a party-like atmosphere listening to music, recounting memorable stories and having tea, coffee, cake and pudding and ice cream. At the end all the families are prayed for

**May 2015: Celebrating Motherhood**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

The Mother of Noble Charater Youths

The Mother of Noble Character Married, 35-59

The Mother of Noble Character Professionals 25-40

The Mother of Noble Character Singles, 35—59

The Mother of Noble Character Elderly, 60 & Up

**June 2015: Celebrating Marriages**

A Sunday morning service should be chosen to celebrate marriages and to have a renewal of the exchange of vows. After the vows there ought to be a time of social fellowship with food and fun and frolic.

SUNDAY MORNING MARRIAGE RENEWAL SERVICE - Taken from Rev. Milton Davidson  
This is a special worship service in which couples already married, separated, will have the opportunity to renew their vows made to each other at the altar years ago.   
The speaker for this service should be informed about the type of service and the special invitation to couples to come to the altar in front of the pulpit to renew their vows.

Here is a suggested outline of the programme for that Sunday Morning Service:   
Welcome families and request that they sit together. Ask ushers to assist in seating each family

Hymn to be Sung — “Love Divine. All Loves Excelling’

Intercessory Prayer

Prayer Hymn. For families of the nation, broken families, backsliding families, ruling families such as those of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Governor General. A prayer for healing forgiveness and reconciliation is prayed.

Special Item (if any) — Could be musical **solo, duet** poetry, reading, choral speaking. etc. (If you are using poetry be sure to find an appropriate poem).

Hymn: — *“0* Perfect Love”

The speaker may wish to invite all married couples present to hold hands and marchdown the aisle to the altar for the renewal of Special Prayer after vows.   
Renewal of Vows: See Example below

Closing Hymn — “Transformed”

Benediction

Example of Renewal of Vows:

This part of the service may take place just *before the* preacher speaks or right after. Make it as meaningful as possible. Ask the help of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and help to the married couples.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God, in the presence of each other and these witnesses to renew our vows and to remind ourselves of the solemn responsibility entered into by divine plan and made binding by divine covenant. Marriage is & holy estate instituted by God and signifies the mystical union *between* Christ and his church. It is this mystical union that these present before the altar, have come to renew. They have also come to renew their p1edge of love and demonstrate their loyalty to each other.

Request that couples answer, ‘I have or I have not’ to the questions asked:   
Have you taken this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to keep and protect her in sickness and in health and forsaking all others keep her unto yourself as long as you both remain alive?   
The men shall Say   
I have.”   
Now turning to the women, the speaker shall ask, “Have you taken this man to be your lawful wedded husband, to have and to keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others *keep* him unto yourself as long as you both remain alive?   
For this part of the renewal ceremony, recommend that the couples hold hands facing each other, then the preacher shall say to the *men*Repeat after me. I (John Brovn)   
 I. John Brown do take thee… Mary Brown to renew my vows and to pledge again my love for better for worse, for richer for *poorer,* until death do us part, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit   
Again turning to the women the preacher shall say, “Repeat after me.   
I Mary Brown do take thee … John Brown to renew my vows and to pledge again my love for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, until death do us part, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit .. Amen.   
In the closing prayer, the preacher shall say “Those whom God joined together let no man put asunder”.

In the closing prayer, the preacher could pray for love and suhmis.ion, understanding, confession and forgiveness. Request that the couples remain where they are after the prayer ends. Ask them to pledge to handle any problem that presently affects their marriage – guilty conscience, failure to forgive, hurt, resentment, suspicion, fear ect.

In confession before God, direct them to ask for his help. In personal renewal that the whole nation may be different… BECAUSE THEIR FAMILY LIVING WILL BE DIFFERENT BEGINNING IMMEDIATELY.

July 2015: Celebrating Fatherhood

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

The Value of Fathers spending time with their Children Youths

Principles in becoming Godly Fathers Married, 35-59

The Value of Fathers spending time with their Children Professionals 25-40

The Value of Fathers spending time with their Children Singles, 35—59

Mentoring Younger Fathers Elderly, 60 & Up

**August 2015: Effective Parenting**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

The Do’s & Don’ts’ of the Electronic Age Youths

Parenting the strong will child as a Team Married, 35-59

Making your Home Safe and Healthy Professionals 25-40

Parenting Step/Children and Others Singles, 35—59

Providing Support to Younger Parents Elderly, 60 & Up

**September 2015: Celebrating the Extended Family**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

The sociological & spiritual value of the Extended Family Married, 35-59

The sociological & spiritual value of the Extended Family Singles, 35-59

The sociological & spiritual value of the Extended Family Professionals

The sociological & spiritual value of the Extended Family Elderly

**October 2015: Building Healthy Families (11)**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

A Biblical Perspective on Dating Youths

Setting Healthy Boundaries for your Children Married, 35-59

How Your Past Impacts your Relationships Professionals 25-40

How Your Past Impacts your Relationships Singles, 35—59

Ministering to Fellow Elderly Elderly, 60 & Up

**November 2015: The Family Life Cycle**

**Possible Topics Age Groups**

Successfully Preparing for the First Child Youths

Successfully Preparing for the First Child Professionals 25-40

Becoming and Attracting the Right Partner Singles, 35-59

Adjusting sexually to the stages of the Family Married, 35-59

Strategies for Coping the Ageing years Elderly, 60 & Up

**December 2015: Establishing A Family Life Center/Support Group**

Lecture Presentation to the Congregations:

The lecture would be electronically prepared by the Christian Education Department of the Church of God in Jamaica and placed on our website. The lecture presentation would contain the “A to Z” of establishing such a center and it would also provide electronic resources which churches could use to better offer family life support.

The session should end however in a celebratory manner as families come together socially whether in the form of a potluck or doing their own cooking or have a catered meal.