THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN

Of

JAMAICA INC.

&

OVERSEAS FELLOWSHIPS

GENERAL CONSTITUTION

&

STATEMENT OF FAITH

FOREWARD

The incorporated Officers of the Church of the Firstborn of Jamaica, the Ministers' Council of the Church, along with representatives from the Jones Town Gospel Hall (where the Church began), held three meetings at the Gospel Auditorium, 95 Waltham Park Road, Kingston 11, to examine a proposed Constitution and Statement of Faith for the Church.

At the **third** meeting held on April 6, 1977, Constitution had its final reading and amendments, upon which, a motion moved by Mr. Colin Bent and seconded by Rev. Allan Jackson resulted in a unanimous acceptance by the entire meeting

This body of leaders was the first to authorise and sign this Constitution into operation.

ARTICLE I **NAME**

This fellowship shall be known as "**THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN OF JAMAICA INCORPORATED**" hereinafter referred to as the **Church of the Firstborn**.

ARTICLE II **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this Fellowship shall be to maintain the public worship of God Almighty, to edify the churches through Christian fellowship and teaching and to carry out an aggressive programme of both national and international evangelism in keeping with the Great Commission of Christ.

ARTICLE III **STATUS**

The Church of the Firstborn is semi-episcopal. There is a Superintendent at the head and an Executive Committee to assist in all matters of the Church. The Jamaica Fellowship shall always be head of the Overseas Fellowships.

ARTICLE IV **STATEMENT OF FAITH AND PRACTICE**

SECTION I SCRIPTURES

The sixty-six (66) canonical books of the Bible, as originally written, were inspired of **GOD**, hence free from error. They constitute the only infallible guide for faith and practice.

SECTION II GOD

There is one **GOD, CREATOR and PRESERVER** of all things, infinite in being and perfection. He eternally exists in three (3) persons: **THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT** who are of one substance and equal in power and glory.

SECTION III JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ, the eternally pre-existent Son, was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. In Him, divine and human natures were united in one person, both natures being whole, perfect and distinct. We believe that He lived a sinless life and died on the Cross as the sinner's substitute. On the Third Day, He rose from the dead, bodily, and ascended to the right hand of the Father where He is now our High Priest and Advocate. He shall come again visibly and personally, in power and glory, to consummate His salvation and His judgement.

SECTION IV HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune God. It is His ministry to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and to apply to man the work of Christ: convicting men of sin, regenerating the

believing sinner, indwelling, guiding, instructing and empowering the believer for godly living and service. Salvation begins with Jesus baptising us into the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11)

SECTION V MAN

Man was created by the direct act of God, in His own image, but Man fell into sin through disobedience and became totally depraved. This resulted in the sentence of death, physical and spiritual (which is separation from God), being passed on all mankind. We believe that all human beings are sinful by nature and in need of redemption which can only be accomplished by **Grace** through **faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ.

SECTION VI SALVATION

The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins as a substitutionary and representative sacrifice and that through **Grace** all who repent and believe in Him are justified from all sin and guilt and made partakers of the gift of eternal life.

SECTION VII CHURCH

The true Church is universal and comprises all such persons who, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ which transcends and overcomes cultural, national, racial and ethnic boundaries, and of which Christ is Head.

SECTION VIII CHURCH RESPONSIBILITY

The believer, having turned to God in penitent faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is accountable to God for living a life of separation from sin and non-conformity to worldly practices and is characterized by obedience to Christ and the Word of God and by demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit. He is obliged to contribute by word and deed to the universal spread of the Gospel.

SECTION IX RESURRECTION

At the end of the age, the bodies of all the dead shall be raised. The righteous shall enter into eternal bliss in the presence of God and the wicked shall be condemned to eternal punishment and death.

SECTION X LORD'S DAY

The new covenant in Jesus brought into being the observation of His glorious resurrection. Thus the first day of the week has been kept as the Lord's Day from Apostolic times.

SECTION XI WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism is by immersion, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, symbolising the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is subsequent to repentance and is the visible demonstration of a commitment to Christ.

SECTION XII MIRACLES

While the occurrences of miracles are not as often today as in former times, they can still happen. The validity and genuineness of such events ought not to be rejected because of their infrequency.

SECTION XIII MARRIAGE

Marriage, as originally intended by God, is to be a life-long bond between a male and female person, hence divorce is not to be viewed as an option to be employed whenever difficulty in the marriage union is experienced.

ARTICLE V **OFFICERS**

The officers of the Church of the Firstborn shall be Superintendent, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer.

SECTION I SUPERINTENDENT

As an act of respect and confidence, the Founder/Superintendent shall so act in that office until he retires through age, ill health or death. The office thereafter shall be determined by the Executive Committee through an electoral process. He shall have the power to veto any matter he thinks vital for the purpose of maintaining prestige or safeguard for the Church. He shall be an ordained minister from the Executive Committee. He shall be free to make recommendations for the offices of General Secretary and Treasurer.

Duties

The Superintendent shall have general oversight of the entire work of the Church, in keeping with the objectives, doctrine and practices of the Constitution.

He shall seek to co-ordinate the work of all departments, with the view of effecting harmonious relationships.

He shall be free to offer counsel to departmental heads, Area Supervisors, heads of Church institutions, Pastors and Evangelists. He shall preside at all Annual Conventions, all Executive Committee and Ministerial Council meetings.

He shall be free to name a Chairman from the Executive Committee to preside at any meeting when necessary.

It shall be his duty to submit a comprehensive report of the Church to the Annual Convention and shall offer such advice and recommendation as he may consider proper and wise.

SECTION II GENERAL SECRETARY

The General Secretary shall be elected by the Executive Committee and shall serve for the duration of the Executive Committee. If there is neglect of duty, three (3) months' notice shall be given for the termination of office. He shall be an ordained Minister from the Executive Committee.

Duties

The General Secretary shall function in an Executive capacity.

He shall be custodian of the Convention files and Church documents, explore areas of extension, visit the various churches and observe their problems.

He shall record and distribute the minutes of the Annual Convention and the Executive Committee meetings.

He shall carry out the other directives given him by the Convention or the Executive Committee.

He shall report to the Convention on major items of general interest as transacted by the Executive Committee.

SECTION III ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

The Assistant General Secretary shall assist the General Secretary in any way possible or act during the absence of the General Secretary.

SECTION IV TREASURER

The Treasurer shall be elected by the Executive Committee and shall serve for the duration of the Executive Committee under full efficiency and trust. If there is neglect or default of duty, three (3) months' notice shall be given for the termination of office. He shall work with a Finance Committee.

A Finance Committee, under the chairmanship of the Superintendent, shall receive and receipt monetary funds, keep an account of and hold in trust all such funds, in keeping with constituted policies and regulations, distribute funds according to the directives of the Executive Committee.

The weekly offerings of the various congregations shall be received by the Finance Committee and monthly returns remitted to Pastors and Evangelists in accordance with the ability of their charge(s), their work and their liabilities, and to any other full-time workers in the field. Reports should be prepared and submitted to the Executive Committee, as required, and if necessary to the Business Session of the Annual Convention. No person(s) within or without The Church of the Firstborn shall, ***without the consent of the Executive Committee,*** commit the church to any expenses.

SECTION V ASSISTANT TREASURER

The Assistant Treasurer shall assist the Treasurer in any way possible or act during the absence of the Treasurer.

ARTICLE VI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There shall be an Executive Committee of **not less than nine nor more than twelve members**, made up from among members of the Ministerial Council and Laity, with the inclusion of a National Youth Director, with a majority of **at least three** from the Council. A simple majority of the elected Committee, representing both the Ministerial Council and the Laity, shall form a quorum. In recognition of the bond between the Jamaica Fellowship and its counterpart Overseas Churches of the Firstborn, the heads of such fellowships or groups of fellowships shall be made ex-officio members of the Executive Committee. They shall have voice but no vote.

SECTION I ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Upon the death or retirement of the Founder/Superintendent, an Election Committee comprising the present Executive Committee and Ministerial Council shall elect a new Executive Committee and thereafter every five (5) years. At this time, all offices shall be vacant. The General Secretary shall be considered as immediate past General Secretary, who shall act as a Presiding Officer in the elections up to the point where a new Superintendent is elected.

The new Executive Committee shall meet immediately afterwards or within fourteen days to elect from among themselves by a simple majority to serve for the duration of the Committee:

i. Superintendent
ii. General Secretary
iii. Assistant General Secretary
iv. Treasurer
v. Assistant Treasurer

SECTION II DUTIES

It shall be the duty of the Executive Committee to see that the Constitution is observed and shall administer the affairs of the Church with integrity and justice. The Executive Committee shall have the knowledge of and shall approve all transactions carried out by the Church. The signatories for the acquisition of personal properties and real estate shall be the Chairman and the General Secretary or, in the absence of one of these officers, one other member of the

Executive Committee can be named. **The Committee shall seek from time to time to explore ways and means to train and develop the believers in the Church for meaningful commitment and fulfilment.** The Committee shall meet at least twice for the year.

Any of the following circumstances shall render a member's seat vacant:

i. worldly entanglements
ii. questionable matters of conduct and finance
iii. absence from two (2) consecutive meetings without causes acceptable to the Committee
iv. seemingly long-term inability to attend meetings
v. change of fellowship or migration

The Committee shall exercise the right to fill, by resolution, any seat rendered vacant.

ARTICLE VII MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

All Ministers, Evangelists and full-time workers, **with the possible inclusion of a National Youth Director**, shall constitute a Ministerial Council. The Council shall meet once in every quarter, with the first meeting in the month of January, and shall review the work within the local congregation in accordance with its administration and growth. The ministerial Council shall not have the power to govern but shall duly carry out the wishes of the Executive Committee at all times. A Secretary shall be appointed from the Council, who shall record all proceedings and prepare minutes for each meeting.

ARTICLE VIII PASTORS AND EVANGELISTS

SECTION I SELECTION

Pastors and Evangelists shall be appointed by the Executive Committee upon the recommendation of the Superintendent. They shall be chosen from among persons approved by the Church of the Firstborn. The ministry shall be one of faith. The Lord said, ***"Go ye also into my vineyards: and whatever is right, that shall ye receive."***

SECTION II DUTIES

Pastors and Evangelists shall be examples to the flock of God by keeping themselves free from all worldly entanglements and above reproach in all matters of conduct and finance. It shall be their duty to preach and teach the word; to exercise prayerful and diligent oversight of the flock, watching for the souls of the saints as those who must give account; to seek earnestly the salvation of the lost, that in all things they may be approved unto God. An Evangelist at any charge shall be supervised by a Pastor.

SECTION III DISCIPLINE

If a matter is raised against the Pastor, it cannot be dealt with by the local congregation, but a written report should be sent to the Superintendent or the General Secretary, through the Pastor, by the Secretary of the local congregation or by any other person who so desires, providing such person can obtain and affix to the report the signatures of two (2) believers from the fellowship. In either case, this must have the Pastor's signature to prove that he has knowledge of the report. The report cannot be honoured if the Pastor has no knowledge of it. If, for some known or unknown reason, the Pastor refuses to sign the report (although he has knowledge of it), the Secretary, or the other persons concerned, may be obliged to send it to the Officer concerned, but with a footnote stating the Pastor's refusal to sign.

If a matter is raised against an Evangelist, the Pastor under whom the Evangelist labours shall be first contacted, who shall make the necessary enquiry. The written procedure would be

proper but not absolutely necessary as the Pastor's oversight is almost immediate. Where the matter seems beyond the immediate control of the Pastor, he shall seek the advice of the Superintendent.

In cases of discipline where matters are considered grave and warrant immediate expedition, and the constitutional procedure could create some measure of delay, the Officers concerned can be contacted directly.

SECTION IV VACATIONS

All Ministers, Evangelists and full-time workers are entitled to two (2) weeks' vacation leave annually, after the first year's service is completed; but it shall not be accumulated. Intended vacation leave should be applied for at least one month in advance. Ministers should make proper arrangements for the continued upkeep of their charge(s) prior to securing leave for their Evangelists or themselves.

ARTICLE IX LOCAL CHURCH

SECTION I CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

The church shall not institute the practice of recorded membership. Since the Church of the Firstborn is universal, fellowship shall only be acknowledged through the **Born Again** process and **Water Baptism** by immersion in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, with the continuous observance of the Statement of Faith.

SECTION II ORGANIZED CONGREGATION

Twelve (12) or more believers fulfilling the conditions of the Church Fellowship and meeting together at any one place under organized leadership can, by the approval of the Executive Committee, form an organized congregation.

SECTION III CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Each congregation shall have a Pastor as head. He shall dispense with his duties under this Constitution. A deaconry, with the Pastor as Chairman, shall constitute a local Board. A majority of the membership shall form a quorum.

The voice of the congregation should be held as extremely important, thus a Business Meeting of the congregation should be held once per month with those present. The Pastor should serve as Chairman. Proper parliamentary procedures shall be observed at both the Board and congregational meetings.

Each congregation shall appoint a Secretary for the Board and congregational meetings, who may or may not be the same person, and a Treasurer. The Secretary shall record all proceedings and prepare minutes for either meetings. The Treasurer shall be a member of the local Board and shall be assisted by a Finance Committee. The Pastor shall not be a Treasurer but shall have full knowledge of all monetary procedures. He shall be Chairman of the Finance Committee.

SECTION IV DEACONS

Deacons shall be appointed by the Pastor according to the patterns of the Scriptures and shall assist in the administration and physical upkeep of the work within their own congregation. A deacon shall first be proved and shall serve under a **three-year** review period following his appointment to evaluate his service in order to determine continuity. The cycle shall run with the first month of the calendar year, six months before or after, whichever is nearer. Laying on

of hands on newly-appointed deacons shall be arranged by the Pastor in consultation with the Superintendent.

A deacon shall maintain his office through immediate availability to serve his congregation with integrity, trust and co-operation. All deacons shall be on **one level** of recognition.

DUTIES

It shall be the duty of a deacon to see that the proper course of giving is observed by all believers, and shall himself be the first example. Although the office should be first used as stated, capabilities can entitle him to any other assignment the Pastor deems fit.

SECTION V

FINANCE

In the local congregation, the believers shall be taught the practice of tithes and offerings. Tithes is **one-tenth** of one's income and offering can be as much as the **whole** balance of that income. Receiving of tithes and offerings should be observed as part of the believer's commitment to God and the fellowship and should be given at each Lord's Day Service (on the first day of the week). If a believer was indisposed or otherwise engaged on the Lord's Day, the tithes and offerings may be sent or given at some convenient time.

Immediately following the last Sunday in each month, the Pastor shall see that the Treasurer forwards all funds received as tithes and offerings to the Central Finance Committee, which shall be put into one purse and remitted to fulfil an allowance packet for Pastors, Evangelists and full-time workers on the field, or for any other causes to which the Executive Committee may direct.

SECTION VI

DISCIPLINE

In view of the necessity for proper upkeep and maintenance of discipline, the Pastor shall have the power to deal with and make a ruling on any matter he considers a detriment to the local church fellowship but should be free and willing to report such matters in detail to the regular or specially called meeting of the local Board and/or congregation.

The Superintendent should always be called to a local congregation whenever it is felt that his intervention could produce greater understanding.

When a questionable or unpopular decision is made by the local Board and /or congregation, or a ruling by the Pastor, a believer or believers affected by such a decision or ruling, shall be free to appeal to the Superintendent or the General Secretary but this should be done in writing within seven (7) days of such a decision or ruling and should be signed by the believer or believers concerned or by any person/s writing on their behalf, and should be addressed to the proper Officer through the Pastor of that local congregation.

SECTION VII

YOUTH

Each congregation, where possible, shall take the necessary steps to organise, for involvement and responsibility, the Youth within the fellowship. There should be a local Youth Council, with a Youth Director to assist the Pastor in the youth ministry in the Church. Approved documentation shall dictate the total operation of the Youth in the Church.

ARTICLE X **WATER BAPTISM AND LORD'S SUPPER**

SECTION 1 WATER BAPTISM

Previous to Water Baptism, the believer shall give a testimony in public regarding his/her born-again experience. Baptism shall be done by the Pastor, or, in extreme circumstances, by his nominee who shall be supervised. Each candidate shall confess in the water that he/she means to deny self and the world to follow the Lord until death. The candidate shall then raise his/her right hand as a vow to solemnize the confession. Upon the confession of the candidate's faith and vow, the Baptizer shall baptize him/her in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The vow to be taken by the candidate shall be as follows:-
*"_____(Candidate's name) Have you denied self and the world to follow the Lord Jesus Christ until death, and are you willing by **Water Baptism** to bury the old man and his deeds and to rise again to walk in newness of life?"*

*The candidate shall say **"YES, I WILL"***

*The candidate shall then raise his/her right hand and say, **"THY VOWS ARE UPON ME, OH GOD."***

The Baptizer shall accept the confession and vow and say,

*"Upon the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in obedience to His Great Commission, I now baptize you in the name of the **FATHER** and of the **SON** and of the **HOLY SPIRIT"***

The Baptizer shall see that the candidate is completely covered under the water and then lift him/her up.

(THE WHOLE PROCESS WOULD THEN BE COMPLETED)

SECTION II LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper in the Church shall be administered by the Pastor and shall be received by the believers who are baptized into the fellowship of Christ and continuing in the faith. This should be observed at least once per month and should be arranged for the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper can be arranged for at will, by the Pastor, to mark any special occasion.

ARTICLE XI **AMENDMENTS**

This Constitution may be amended by a t**wo-thirds** majority vote of the total membership of the Executive Committee providing all members are notified in writing of the intended amendment at least t**wo months** before the meeting.