Announcing an Exciting New Marriage Curriculum for African Americans:

The Program for Strong African American Marriages (ProSAAM)

The ProSAAM Research Team at the University of Georgia, in collaboration with our partners at PREP (the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program), are pleased to announce the availability of ProSAAM, a teach-out-of-the-box curriculum for use by faith-based organizations and groups with a marriage enrichment focus. What’s ProSAAM all about? It’s as easy as our name—P-R-O-S-A-A-M.

P stands for prayer. We recognize that marriage is founded on religious faith. As one of our participants shared, “We turn to our faith to not only get married, but also stay married.” Prayer is used throughout the curriculum to help strengthen and protect marriages by focusing on the partner’s well-being, anchoring the relationship in faith, and helping to engender feelings of closeness to one’s partner. By integrating prayer in marital skills training, the program builds upon the strong foundation of prayer within African American culture. To our knowledge, ProSAAM is the first major marriage education curriculum to so thoroughly focus on prayer as a fundamental element of what is taught.

ProSAAM also offers prayer as a skill that is executable in the heat of conflict. While marriage enrichment programs provide an opportunity to work on strengthening important relationship-building skills, couples may struggle with practicing learned skills and techniques when they need them most—during disagreements and times of stress. So, while couples may not be inspired to use a communication skill, they might be willing to pray in the moment. In this respect, prayer is a “bonus” skill used to prime loving behavior, positive communication, and problem-solving skills.

R is for research-tested and research-based. We are aware of no other marriage enrichment programs designed with African American couples in mind that are research-tested. At the University of Georgia, researchers have been learning about how 500 African Americans couples benefitted from ProSAAM since 2005. This research is ongoing. Additional information about the program and the study’s findings can be found at http://www.uga.edu/prosaam. In addition to the ongoing research in Georgia, ProSAAM incorporates many elements from the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (http://www.prepinc.com). PREP is one of the most comprehensive and well-respected divorce-prevention/marriage enhancing programs in the world. Based on over 30 years of research with couples, PREP is a skills-based and principles-building curriculum designed to help partners communicate in a healthy manner, get to the heart of problems, and preserve, protect, and deepen positive connection.
O is for oneness. ProSAAM helps couples to reconnect with their deepest desires for their relationship. The first session in ProSAAM is titled, “The Joy of Oneness.” Couples take a moment to travel down memory lane and recall the things that first attracted them to one another. Couples also talk about the power of oneness and how to protect this quality in their marriages. The curriculum also covers communication (i.e., Speaker-Listener Technique), expectations and hidden issues, problem-solving, developing a prayerful life in your marriage, and fun and physical oneness (a crowd pleaser!)—all in the context of Christian teachings about marriage.

S is for skills. ProSAAM offers valuable life skills to help strengthen a marriage. Unlike marriage counseling, which involves overcoming a specific problem, this marriage enrichment program helps with a wider range of issues. As such, the skills typically center on effective communication and problem-solving.

In addition to the traditional communication techniques, ProSAAM is unique in that it also promotes prayer as a skill in helping couples to reconnect and show love toward each other. Prayer in this respect is a culturally sensitive addition to the program designed to serve as a catalyst for encouraging couples to have positive intentions toward their mate. ProSAAM’s focus on empathic listening, a skill that may be useful in helping couples to shield their marriages from harsh external forces like racism, is also special. Empathic listening is introduced in a segment titled, “Listening, Support, and Conflict Resolution.”

A is for available. The ProSAAM Kit is available for purchase now. No training is necessary. Everything* you need to teach a 12- to 15-hour couple’s workshop is included in the ProSAAM kit, including a manual with instructions for the leader, a sample participant manual, a 3-disc DVD set, a resource disk with sample program schedules and helpful hints, and a package of Speaker-Listener tiles (also referred to as floor cards). The kit is available for $199 in the Christian PREP bookstore at http://www.prepinc.com. Each participant manual is $8.00. * (Note: To use the curriculum, you would also need to obtain a copy of the participant manual for each person in the couple’s workshop).

A is for adaptable. Want to adapt other helpful resources? We encourage you to tailor-make a marriage enrichment program that will best benefit the population you serve or reflect the specific mission of your organization. There are many available resources to help supplement your use of the ProSAAM Kit, including books (e.g., A Lasting Promise, Fighting For Your Marriage), a prayer journal (i.e., Like A Tree Planted By the Water: A Prayer Journal For My Marriage), communication props, and training support. Many of these resources can be purchased from the PREP website. For group sales information, a list of recommended resources, or to request training support, please email prosaam@uga.edu.

M is for materials. For more information about our materials, call (706) 542-7011 or email prosaam@uga.edu. You may also view the kit in the Christian PREP bookstore at http://www.prepinc.com.