

What's Your Next Move?

It's your first weekend as the new pastor of the Familytown Church. It always takes a while to get to know the lay of the land in a new situation, so you know you need to take advantage of the situation when they have the a fellowship meal following the services in honor of the new pastoral family.

During the meal you notice that there's a young couple that's obviously paying a lot of attention to each other and not much attention to anyone else.

She appears to be about 19 and he might be edging on 21 or so. There's a little girl, about 3, hanging around and you assume it the young woman's little sister because they look like they really should be related. By random questioning you find out the little girl's name is Shelly and the couple are Karen and Gary.

As part of the random "get to know you" discussions you ask the head elder's wife and say, "Tell me about Karen and Gary." There's a funny silence as the lady looks away and she finally says, "You'll have to ask my husband about that."

Well, it ends up that Gary and Karen grew up in that church and were high-school sweethearts. Gary went away to school for a while and Karen quickly took up with a guy named Dan. She got pregnant pretty quickly and she and Dan married. Shelly is not her sister, she's her daughter.

Dan ended up having no resistance to nearly any vice in life. He was pretty abusive to both Karen and Shelly. When Gary came home from school it was somewhat natural for Karen to gravitate toward his direction at church. It seemed safe to do that for Dan wouldn't have been caught dead near the church. Gary and Shelly really hit it off and it probably was only a matter of time before Dan would fly the coop or get arrested or worse.

Karen is closing in on filing for divorce and everyone in the church seems to assume that someday, down the line, there may be another wedding approaching.

The church members aren't completely comfortable with it, but many of them think it's kind of cute. They know it's not an ideal arrangement and everyone wishes that Dan had never been part of the picture. That's as much as the church members want to know... they are afraid to assume anything more.

Within a matter of weeks you try to befriend as many of the church members as you can. After you've had a chance to gain some of their confidence you get a call from Gary and Karen. They want to talk to you. That's when you find out what the church members didn't want to assume... Karen is pregnant with Gary's child.

They admit it was wrong and intend to marry as soon as the divorce is final. O.K., pastor, what's your next move?

CLOSEOUT THOUGHTS: As is often reality, the most effective values questions of life come from real life. This was a true scenario that confronted me in a church family some years ago. Only the names have been changed to protect... you know the rest.

I know how I handled it, and unlike many other decisions in life it's one of the few times that I think I got it right. (If you're really curious, email me and I'll tell you how it played out in my ministry years ago... **betweenthelines@integrity.com.**)