

Ministering to George, Jane, and the Jetson Clan: The Case for Community-based Relationship Ministry

by K. Jason Krafsky

The Jetson family desperately needs some help. Is your church ready to minister to them?

You remember the Jetsons, don't you?

The 21st century cartoon family was created in the late-1950s by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, who fashioned a futuristic reality with flying saucers, robots, and Space Needle-like buildings. While they transformed every aspect of transportation, architecture, and technology, it never dawned on them to alter the nuclear family.

Well, forget what you think you remember about the Jetsons. This ain't the fifties. The family has been modified (*by this author*) in light of current statistics and trends on marriage, divorce, and family issues. Here's a more realistic portrayal of the Jetsons 21st century life.

George has a son from his first marriage. He talks with his son a couple times a month, but only sees him during the summer because George, Jr. lives with his mom and step dad in a galaxy far, far away.

Jane (George's current wife) grew up without knowing her dad. Her mom had to work two jobs, which meant Jane spent a lot of time by herself. Looking for love in all the wrong places, Jane became pregnant right after graduating high school. The father would leave town before the baby girl (named Judy) was born.

After a short stint as a single, George met Jane in an online chat room. They fell in love. Because of his divorce, George was a little gun-shy of marriage. Jane had never married, and was in no rush to do so. They decided to live together reasoning that "a piece of paper" wouldn't make a difference in their love for one another.

Everything changed when Jane got pregnant with Elroy. George and Jane decided to get married and make their family "official." Elroy's first year was spent in hospitals receiving intensive medical treatments for some health issues he was born with. The financial and emotional stress created a permanent strain in George and Jane's relationship.

For George and Jane, arguing has replaced talking. Romance is non-existent and both are coping with their personal and family pain in different ways. George is a workaholic, who regularly confides in Mr. Spacely's flirtatious and single secretary about his marriage woes. They have begun having drinks together after work. Jane's attempt to look like the "perfect housewife" fools some people, but not her housekeeping robot. When Jane is not shopping, working out, or attending school-related functions, she is self-medicating with a bottle of wine and some pills.

Judy grew up resenting Elroy. He was doted on and received all the attention from their parents. The pain she felt fractured her relationship with her step dad, and by her teen years, created a rift in her relationship with her mom. The teen-aged, pony-tailed blonde attended raves and parties and discovered new ways to cope with her pain: drugs, alcohol, and sex. Last week she discovered she is eight weeks pregnant, and has contracted an incurable STD. According to her personal web blog, she struggles with bulimia and cuts herself regularly.

Elroy's earlier health issues impacted him through elementary school. Being small for his age with a squeaky, immature voice made him an easy and frequent target for teasing. While life at school was extremely challenging, life at home was a breeze. He got anything and everything he wanted from mom and dad. He never understood why he and Judy never got along. He is now in middle school and has few friends; but none better than his dog, Astro. He has dyed his blonde hair black and wears black clothes. Elroy regularly plays online role-playing games, but recently discovered his dad's list of porn sites and is spending more time looking at them.

George, Jane, and the Jetson clan are coming to your church this weekend. Is your church ready?

A quick assessment shows this one family unit needs a combination of marriage counseling, step family support education, alcohol and drug recovery, sexual addiction recovery (for dad and son), eating disorder counseling, mentoring, parenting classes, ministry to unwed mothers, and a youth course on healthy relationships. There's more, but this gives you a taste of their most urgent needs.

Will they find help at your church? Will they find hope through your church? Of course, they'll hear about Jesus. But will they also find the practical ministries they need to effectively walk through the pressing relationship issues and challenges they are experiencing? Will they find the intervention services they need to get healthy and whole?

The bottom line question is: does your congregation have the resources, the people, the time, and the programs to adequately minister to George, Jane, Judy, and Elroy?

I am willing to bet that there is not a single congregation in the nation that can completely meet the desperate needs of this single family.

This is not a slam on the Church. The diverse and complex needs of the twenty-first century family demand an innovative and strategic twenty-first century ministry solution.

Even for the handful of congregations that think they up to the challenge to minister to the Jetsons, take a look at the current marriage and family landscape: fragile families are trending at all-time high numbers (step families, grandparent-led families, single parent families, and unmarried parent families); intensive relationship issues are reaching crisis levels (i.e. sexual addiction, domestic violence, transmission of STD's among young people); and the marriage rate is at a historic low.

No other modern or ancient society has experienced the unprecedented changes to the family like America has over the last forty years. This is where the twenty-first century family of God comes in.

Community-based Relationship Ministry (CBRM) occurs when churches work with others in their local area to provide resources or services to help individuals, couples, families, parents, and children thrive in their relationships. *CBRM* can expand the breadth and depth of prevention and intervention services churches provide to people in all stages of the life spectrum of relationships.

Community-based Relationship Ministry is John 17 in action. The quality of the relationships between the churches determines how extensive the *CBRM* can be. There are different levels of *CBRM* based on the comfort level, trust, and unity that exists between the congregations.

Level One: Relationship Ministry Champion

Two or more churches promote, co-sponsor, or host a marriage, parenting, or family enrichment event; or support a relationship ministry emphasis in their local community.

Level Two: *Community Standard-Bearer*

Churches form and sign a community agreement committing to a set of requirements (i.e. pre-marital education before a wedding), and a set of principles to raise the standard for relationships in the community. Churches remain independent and autonomous, but agree to mutual accountability. Over the last decade, thousands of churches in hundreds of communities have become a community standard-bearer by signing some sort of agreement.

Level Three: *Relationship Ministry Referral Network*

Churches create a directory of existing services and resources for referral purposes, and to increase community awareness of relationship ministry programming, events, and activities. The network listing may be online or in a hard copy format. Dozens of web sites have been created so people in the community know where to turn to find classes, seminars, or conferences on marriage, parenting or relationship issues.

Level Four: *Relationship Ministry Partnership*

Churches take steps to integrate ministries by creating a common vision for marriages and families, develop a common mission for marriages and families, and partner together to provide resources and services that improve the health of their community's marriages, families, and relationships. Rather than duplicating the basic services that all churches offer (i.e. pre-marital for first time marriages), the partnership enables churches to be strategic in creating programs that are lacking in the community. Also, other churches in the partnership can support and refer their people to those new ministries.

Level Five: *Community Marriage & Family Initiative*

Churches work with other sectors of the community (faith, education, business, legal, medical, media, social, civic, and others) to develop a long-term effort where marriages and families are strengthened, nurtured, and encouraged by a community-wide partnership. The churches can become a community asset through the initiative by providing an array of marriage and family ministries, expanding relationship programs, creating media campaigns, and working with others to meet the relationship needs of the community.

The relational needs of couples, parents, families, singles, and youth are great. Greater than any one church or organization can meet. This is why the Association of Marriage and Family Ministries, Families Northwest, the Marriage CoMission and other organizations are promoting collaborative and cooperative partnerships to meet those needs. The only way to turn the tide on family breakdown and help this next generation of married couples and parents is to work together.

Community-based Relationship Ministry is not only how churches will provide marriage and family ministry in the future, it is one of the most effective outreach strategies the Church can take on today.

CBRM helps more churches connect with more people in their community to meet more of the relationship needs of people like George Jetson ... his boy Elroy ... daughter Judy ... Jane his wife.

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