

## **LIFE Community Case Study Toxic?**

**LIFE Community Leaders:** Steve and Charlene Frantzis

**LIFE Community Members:** Mike and Anita Metzger, Elijah and Lourdes Adade, Santi and Marissa Samuels, Patti Greely, Martin Ashley, Rick and Shelby Gordon, Felix and Alice Chung, Francie and Bill Winslow, Stephanie Sartella

**Background:** The Newton LIFE Community has been meeting together for two years now. From the very beginning, it has been a vibrant group – with everyone contributing and participating. In the fall of 09, they added a few new people through the **LIFELink** event.

One couple that joined has been a great help to Steve and Charlene. Mike and Anita Metzger have shared in the teaching and coordination of the communication for the group. Another recent addition was Stephanie. Stephanie is a single woman who lives alone. For a variety of reasons, and for many years, she has been struggling with life. She often shares with the group about her loneliness, her financial troubles, and her chronic health issues. Early on, the group was very supportive and affirming, but recently Stephanie's troubles have seemed to dominate the life of the group. Steve and Charlene have seen people's commitment to the group wane a bit, and they are wondering how to best address the malaise before the group falls completely apart.

**The Challenge:** Every group has someone who requires 'extra grace' and an important aspect of the body of Christ is to care for those who are especially in need of love and support. What is the best way to address the needs of those who are struggling without sinking the morale of the group? How do you weigh the needs of a person against the needs of an individual?

**The January LIFE Community:** The week before the first LIFE Community of the new year, Steve and Charlene decided that they wanted to launch the year with strength, so made personal phone calls to everyone in the group reminding them to come. When Steve got Santi Samuels on the phone, Santi said he and his wife couldn't make it that night because they had tickets to a concert. When Steve pressed Santi a bit further, Santi admitted that he and wife felt like they weren't getting as much out of the group as they used to. They missed the joyful spirit of the early days of the group and, while not mentioning Stephanie specifically, felt that the group felt more of a drain on them recently.

Patti Greely was not so guarded when Charlene called her. She told Charlene that early on she and Stephanie had been getting together outside the group meeting. At the beginning, Patti was supportive, but when she began to encourage Stephanie to take some positive steps in her life, Stephanie began to turn on her, saying that she could never understand the problems that she was dealing with and telling her that she was insensitive.

After a few other phone calls, it became very clear to Char and Steve that the reason people were struggling with their commitment to their LIFE Community was Stephanie. People felt she was dominating the conversation, making people feel like their offers for help were never enough, and making it uncomfortable for others to be open and genuine in their own sharing.

Steve and Charlene reflected together on what they had just heard. It was true that in the past they had spoken to Stephanie about setting limits on how much and how long she shares in the group meeting, but they admitted that it really hadn't changed her behavior any. Much of what they heard from group members was what they had suspected, but now the issues were very clear. Something needed to be done or the life of the group would soon be extinguished.

After their phone calls were made, the Frantzis' sat down and prayed together about what they had heard. When they were done praying, together they began to lay out a plan of attack. They committed themselves to do everything in their power to bring an end to their group's troubles and to help them all to embrace better days ahead.

**The Solution:** If you were the leader of this group, what would be your plan of attack?

Questions:

1. How do you balance the needs of one individual against the needs of the entire group?
2. Are there other people that you might engage in order to help you navigate this situation?
3. Would you share with Stephanie what you had heard from the group? Why or why not?
4. What would be your very next step?