

Case Study – Deacon Joe

Deacon Joe felt a bit sorry for Lily, a young woman who had joined the parish RCIA programme as a new convert. Lily has expressed feelings of isolation with almost no friends. She shares stories about being bullied at school and has always found it hard to fit in. Joe makes sure that Lily is always made welcome at the evening meetings and when she comes to Mass he makes a point of saying hello with a welcoming smile.

Lily says she is finding it hard to understand some aspects of the faith and asks Joe if he can help her understand the catechism better. He arranges to meet her after the RCIA sessions to go through things with her.

Lily always sends Joe a text after their meetings *“just to say thanks, Lily xx”* and Joe always replies with a smiley face.

After the Mass where six people are received into the church, Joe wants to congratulate Lily for all her hard work and gives her a small gift of a rosary and prayer book.

A couple of weeks later, Joe receives a letter from Lily in which Lily shares how much their relationship has meant to her during her Journey in faith. He tells Joe what a special person he is and that she has never felt such kindness and love before. Joe replies with a card saying how proud he is of her and that he is looking forward to seeing her at Mass each week.

After Mass that Sunday, Joe is saying goodbye to the parishioners and when he smiles at Lily and says he is really pleased to see her there, she gives him a big hug and kiss on the cheek and quickly leaves. Joe feels a bit uncomfortable but ignores it.

That week he receives another letter. This time Lily expresses how much she loves Joe and feels like she is falling in love with him. Joe replies how flattered he is and tries to gently explain that he is not able to reciprocate those feelings. He beats about the bush a bit as he does not want to hurt her feelings.

However, the letters start to become more frequent, more explicate and each time Joe responds with more and more detail about why they cannot have a romantic relationship.

Soon Joe starts receiving daily text messages, emails and letters which he continues to respond to at length and now he sees Lily hanging around the church and near his house.

He is feeling stalked and unsure what to do.

Questions;

What should Joe do now?

Is there anything that Joe could have done to avoid this?

Have you experienced unwanted attention? If so, what did you do?

What support do you think you could use and when?