

Case Study – Fr Jeremy “Jez”

Fr Jeremy is a newly ordained, young, assistant priest and is chaplain to the local Catholic secondary school. He is very popular with the young people and the teachers.

Fr Jeremy and his elderly parish priest do not have a great relationship. Fr Jeremy is young and energetic and was full of expectations but he is feeling a bit of a spare part in the parish, unwanted and a bit lonely.

The parish priest is a bit concerned about the amount of time Fr Jeremy is spending at the school but quite frankly, he is relieved that he is occupied outside the church.

Fr Jeremy is very engaged with the school, he is a governor, offering the head teacher advice, pastorally supporting the other teachers and, most of all, enjoys interacting with the children and young adults. He is often seen on the playground at lunchtime, playing football or chatting with small groups and he enjoys them calling him Fr Jez.

He encouraged a couple of parents to start an after-school Catholic youth group for activities and discussion groups which he regularly attends. At one of these groups he is asked to lead a group discussion about chastity and he talks about the “theology of the body”. The young people request that the parents are not present as they are embarrassed and don’t feel free to talk if they were there. Some of the group are very open about their struggles living in a society that has moral standards that are radically different to the Church’s teaching. Fr Jeremy feels a bit uncomfortable about how open some of the older children talk about their sexual encounters. He suggests that to help them make sense of their emotions they might consider a journaling exercise and write down their thoughts.

The next day a couple of lower sixth form girls approach Fr Jeremy and ask if they can share their journals with him. He takes them with him and he promises to read them so they can discuss it in a couple of days’ time. Fr Jeremy is a bit shocked with the content of one of the journals and sends the girl a text to ask if they can discuss it the next day in private because he is concerned about her willingness towards promiscuity and an inability to say no to boys. At this meeting the girl becomes upset and feels that Jeremy is judging her. She says “I thought you were my friend” and grabbing her journal, runs off in tears. Fr Jeremy sends her a text to reassure her that he was not judging her and that he wants to care for her and make sure she is OK.

That day the girl makes a complaint to the head teacher who reports the situation to the diocesan safeguarding office for advice.

Questions

How do you feel about this story?

What do you think the outcome of this should be?

What is safeguarding and what are boundary issues?

Can you identify what boundaries were/were not in place?

Who are the responsible people in this situation?