

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Merry Christmas

By Frank Klees, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Many constituents are not Christian. I would think you would acknowledge multiculturalism and not only those who share your own personal religious views.

This email was sent to me shortly after I published my Christmas greetings in both of our local newspapers. The same greeting and invitation to join me and our federal MP Lois Brown at our Christmas Yuletide Gathering was also sent to the more than 4,000 families on our constituency distribution list.

Those words had a profound impact on me. Was I really being that insensitive?

I had made a concerted effort over the years to reach out to, and embrace, the diverse religious and cultural groups in our communities. My schedule was always filled with events where I was honoured to join in special religious observances and to celebrate cultural festivals.

At many of those events, I would be asked to bring greetings on behalf of the legislature and the community, and would always attempt to honour those gathered with the appropriate greeting for the occasion.

Whether they were the traditional Muslim greetings of As-salam lekum and Eid Mubarak, or the Sikh greeting of sat sri akal or extending Happy Hanukkah greetings to my Jewish friends, these were, and continue to be, expressions of respect for our diversity that I was honoured to extend.

I would think that you would acknowledge multiculturalism?

I read that email one more time. Yes, many constituents are not Christian, but those who are, deserve no less recognition from me as their MPP than I have been extending to those who hold different religious beliefs, or none at all. I responded with the following email:

...I am responding to your email in which you point out that many of my constituents are not Christian.

After serving as an MPP for 18 years, I am well aware of our diversity and have had the privilege of serving in three distinct electoral districts in York Region over that time. One of those included the Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham, which are among the most diverse communities in the province.

I have attended many religious and cultural events in Hindu Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, Muslim Mosques and Jewish Synagogues and have always enjoyed engaging in the celebrations of the respective communities.

In turn, over those 18 years, I have always hosted a Christmas reception for my constituents because that happens to be my faith and culture (as it is for many of my constituents). It gives me joy to invite people of other faiths to join with me and my family in that celebration and I have always felt honoured to have my constituents of all faiths and cultures join with me on those occasions.

This is the first time in 18 years that I have experienced a rebuke for extending an invitation to join in what has been an annual Christmas celebration. Should you choose to attend, you will be joining with many people of diverse faith to celebrate what are common values of all faiths - peace, friendship, family and goodwill.

I extend that invitation to you and take this opportunity to wish you and your family the very best for the holiday season.

Christmas Yuletide Gathering was a huge success

That Christmas celebration was attended by a few hundred of my constituents this past Sunday afternoon. As is always the case, many were not Christian. What was evident, however, was that the spirit of friendship and goodwill was very much present in the room. And it was refreshing to engage in conversations that were uplifting and that transcended the often divisive topic of politics. The generous donations of food items will be delivered to our local food banks and on behalf of those who will benefit, I thank those who contributed.

A special message to our First Responders

I also want to extend a special message to the men and women who are serving our communities and our country as First Responders. To those serving in our military, police officers, fire fighters, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors, emergency medical technicians and emergency managers?

A sincere thank you to you and your families for what you do to ensure our safety and security.
As the Member of Provincial Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora, I want to extend best wishes for a Merry Christmas, and the very best for the coming year to all.