

Dear Reader

As was reported in the Citizen Newspaper a couple planning a same sex union came to view Oakfield Farm as a venue for their wedding. They were referred to me and I notified them of our position, which they accepted at the time, but expressed their unhappiness with the way their enquiry was handled. They felt that we had not been up front in letting them know that we do not conduct same sex marriages. They felt embarrassed and humiliated and suggested that to avoid this situation from occurring Oakfield Farm should make this position clear on the web site. My response was one of agreement. I called later in the week to apologise again and inform them that this information was now available on our contact page.

Our intention was to be upfront and honest about our beliefs and the implications thereof. Unfortunately, the notice was seen as an intolerant declaration of our religious beliefs. This was aggravated when the notice was copied from our website onto Facebook which then went viral on the internet. It without doubt upset and offended many people. This was never our intention and we have removed the notice from our website for this reason.

We do however stand firm in our faith. Our actions are determined not by any prejudice but by our religious beliefs and conscience and we confirm that we welcome all people, from all races, creeds, cultures and sexual orientation to our venue, but we humbly ask that our beliefs are respected as expressed in our terms and conditions since 2006. There are many excellent venues nearby and further afield, that do not share our beliefs, whose diversity will enable them to meet the specific needs of couples looking for a place to celebrate their union.

Oakfield Farm has an unprecedented reputation of kindness, hospitality, warmth and honesty. We try as best as is humanly possible to demonstrate Christ's commandment "to love our neighbour as ourselves" to clients, guests and our staff alike. I do not believe that there is any trace of discrimination in any form, be it on the grounds of racial or sexual orientation at Oakfield Farm. We believe that everyone has inherent dignity that should be respected and protected.

Nonetheless we are not perfect and I have no hesitation in expressing my deepest regret if my actions have hurt or offended any person. I ask that this humble apology be accepted.

Finally, have I learnt anything from my actions? Yes indeed:

- I will in the future take greater care to be deeply humble, considerate and sensitive when discussing my personal beliefs.
- I have a greater awareness that we all, and myself in particular, feel much more sensitive and vulnerable when our personal beliefs are challenged than I previously realised.
- I have also come to appreciate our constitution in the way it protects equally our religious rights, freedom of speech and our freedom to choose our sexual orientation. These rights need to stand together and no right has more importance than another. This is the meaning of true tolerance.
- I have come to understand that our diversity is precious and that we as a nation must hold to our beliefs and principles. Equally though, we must understand that relationships are precious and need to be founded on a love and respect that remains constant irrespective of who we are or what we believe.
- I have come to a deeper and renewed understanding that the acceptance of others and their own personal culture, belief and world view is much more difficult than we think it is. This introspection is not only difficult but also painful if we look at ourselves honestly.

In conclusion, I have realised that if I meet another person face to face and we discover that we had a fundamental difference of beliefs, the relationship will be compromised at that point. If so then one or both of us harbours a prejudice that we must be honest enough to confront.

This has been a time of deep introspection for me. We are all struggling in a broken world, but not a world without hope for a better future.

Sincerely
Matthew Stubbs