

This Retailer Wouldn't Let Customers Use the Words 'Jesus Christ'

The words "Christ" and "Jesus Christ" have been removed from a list of banned offensive terms by Marks & Spencer. The u-turn follows an online barrage of comments after it emerged, that the the terms were banned.

Christ blocked

Customers who had previously tried to include them in greetings with online purchases of flowers were prevented from completing their orders, with an on-screen notification, reading: "Sorry, there's something in your message we can't write."

The policy emerged this weekend when Geraldine Stockford, a pastor's wife from Christ Church Teddington, was blocked from ordering a £35 bouquet of spring flowers as a gift. The message Geraldine had tried to enter ran: "Thank you for your care and practical help for Margaret in her last days ... With love from her church family, Christ Church Teddington."

Gerardine originally thought her message was too long so altered the text to make it shorter; when the problem persisted she rang M&S's call center and was told a word must have been blocked. The blocked word turned out to be "Christ." She said: "He (a customer service representative at an M&S call center) had to write my message for me because I couldn't do it over the Internet."

Jihad permitted

M&S said: "An automatic phrase-checker is in place to prevent the use and misuse of certain words and it includes hundreds

of words of varying natures. It is common for us to override the checker at the customer's request."

The "automatic phrase-checker" appeared to have been temporarily disabled following the outbreak of the story. Further testing of M&S' "automatic phrase-checker" before it had been disabled found that other religious terms, such as Allah, Buddha and Muhammad as well as jihad were permitted, but inputting swear words triggered the same message as inputting Christ.

"Sad state of affairs"

Andrea Minichiello Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, who addressed Christ Church Teddington on Saturday said: "It is a sad state of affairs if the start point is to assume the word Christ is being used to be offensive.

We are delighted that Marks and Spencer has responded to the huge concern raised by members of the general public on this matter and will no longer "blacklist" the name of Jesus Christ as a swear word or one that gives offense, Jesus Christ is the most pivotal figure in our nation's history, His name captures God's redeeming love for all people and it is remarkable that it was ever banned."