

## Fast food offends religious woman

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When Christianity and capitalism collide at a McDonald's, the impact isn't always pretty.

But it ratcheted up to downright nasty earlier this month when Kathy Duncan visited a Mickey D's on Lancaster Drive NE to feed her small son.

Duncan said she was buzzing through the drive-through with her son, Matthew, now 6, when her Catholicism was insulted.

She ordered Matthew a Happy Meal (the McDonald's children's meal) and asked that the chain substitute a Filet-O-Fish sandwich for the hamburger, cheeseburger or chicken nuggets option because she and her family didn't eat beef or chicken on Fridays during the 40-day Lenten season (this year from Feb. 22 through April 7).

Duncan said she was stunned when the McDonald's employee told her that the substitution wasn't "allowed."

"She said she couldn't do it, and I told her I was Catholic and why I needed it, and that all I really wanted was a fish sandwich, the kid's box and the toy," Duncan said. "I even offered to pay extra for the sandwich, I just wanted the box and toy for my child. All the time you can buy a different drink and pay the difference in price, why would it be any different for a sandwich?"

Duncan said she tried to explain why her son couldn't eat meat or chicken, but she said that her explanation was ignored and that the employee repeated it wasn't going to happen.

Outraged, Duncan drove off without any food and said in a message to the newspaper that she was calling for a boycott of McDonald's on Fridays.

When interviewed, she added that she wished she'd remembered to announce the injustice to her church parent club before spring break.

"I want to get the word out that McDonald's doesn't respect our religion and doesn't deserve our business," Duncan said. "We live with different cultures, and I think they should be more accommodating to other cultures and beliefs. I think it would be wonderful if they accommodated all beliefs."

But part of this nation's freedom of religion is the option to embrace any religion such as Judaism, Buddhism, Muslim, Hinduism, Unitarian, Native American faith (about 5 percent of the population) to name a few. There also is the freedom to be unaffiliated as evidenced by about 16 percent of the population that considers itself agnostic or atheist, according to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Corporations tend to operate secularly to avoid catering to any one religion. To use Duncan's religious-accommodation logic, McDonald's would not be serving hamburger at all in the U.S.

According to the "Hinduism Today" a website based out of Hawaii, as of 2008, there were about 2.3 million Hindus living in the U.S. For these Indian Americans, the cow remains a protected animal, and many do not eat beef. In their native country, most rural Indian families

have at least one dairy cow, a gentle animal that is often treated as a member of the family.

Lisa Nelson, a spokeswoman for the northwest region of McDonald's corporation, said McDonald's offers a wide variety of menu items to accommodate the tastes and cultural preferences of its customers in the 119 countries where it does business.

In India, where about 83 percent of the population is Hindu, beef burgers are not sold at any of its restaurants. Instead, it offers a chicken Maharaja Mac as a substitute for the Big Mac, and it serves the Big Spicy Paneer Wrap. McDonald's also serves the Wasabi Filet-o-Fish and the Ebi Filet-O (shrimp) burger in Japan, Burbur Ayam (chicken porridge) in Malaysia and grilled chicken twisty pasta, a breakfast item, in Hong Kong.

In the United States, Americans of many descents love their beef. McDonald's has fish on the menu. Should it also be expected to customize its menu further to accommodate all of the faiths that seek freedom under the U.S.'s equal-religious opportunity umbrella?

Julie Edwards, a local spokeswoman for McDonald's, said Duncan could have ordered her son a hamburger without the patty in his Happy Meal, and he would have gotten a melted, processed cheese-food sandwich.

Or, she could have gone to another fast-food restaurant and ordered him a cheese pizza, or my childhood Lenten favorite, the vegetable chow mein sandwich ala Young's Restaurant in Fall River, Mass.

Edwards said the owners of the McDonald's in question, Michael Seaman and Jill Pollard Seaman, are both Catholic. She said that they were sorry Duncan was treated less than professionally and that it was an "operational glitch."

"No harm was intended," Edwards said. "We apologize for the inconvenience and suggest the best way to resolve this is for her to go in and talk to the owners, if possible. We also are working to see what we can do to improve the override part of the key system for this sort of request."

That would be the best resolution, and it would keep more in line with what many practicing Catholics believe: that when they fast (not if), they don't make a show of it. They treat it as a personal act of devotion to their god.