

EoC 1 Bakery from Living City July 2009

Achieving success

After their bakery went up in flames, a Korean catering company rebuilt and renewed its commitment to the principles of the Economy of Communion in Freedom

By Fedes Lim and Amata Kim

Fedes: In 1956, after the Korean War, my father started a small bakeshop for steamed bread in Daejeon City, South Korea. As a child, I grew up with the witness given by my parents as practicing Catholics. They would distribute the unsold bread to people in need at the end of the day, and soon the news spread that the bakery was selling only fresh bread. It was a success.

Twenty-eight years ago I inherited the company, and while active in the parish, after five years I met the Focolare Movement. Through it, my wife and I attended a seminar on social issues in the Philippines. We felt God was asking us to apply what we had learned in our business.

Amata: On our plane trip home, we decided to pay an appropriate salary to each employee and to join the Economy of Communion in Freedom. We also chose as our motto a sentence from St. Paul: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:2). To be able to please our clients and our employees, my husband and I promised each other that every morning, before going to work, we would renew our reciprocal love so that Jesus himself, present among us, could run the company through us.

Fedes: Transparency became a basic characteristic of my management over these years. I would show the balance sheet and our tax payments to our employees. Even though they and others told me that if I did everything honestly nothing would remain for us, I still believed that God would shower us with his concrete love.

Then a few years later, our company experienced a great difficulty. While we were away, a relative made bad investments. Sales dropped, and I could not see any solution to this problem. Not having profits, we had to stop sharing part of our monthly profit for our participation in the EoC. And, as if this were not enough, our bakery went up in flames.

Amata: I had just come back from Mass that Saturday when I heard that our bakery was on fire. I ran over, and it was a big fire indeed. Fedes was away, and I was quite afraid. However, I felt that this was the moment to be faithful to my promise to accept any suffering and difficulty that would come my way as willed or permitted by God, so I said “yes.” Seeing the black smoke and the big fire, I remembered a thought from Scripture, “Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity” (Eccl 1:2). I ran to the church and told Jesus in a loud voice, “Lord, you are my only good,” as I wiped my tears away. At that moment I experienced peace and security. I called Fedes to tell him about the fire. It turned out that 24 people had been injured.

Fedes: The day after the fire, the employees came to work in a temporary location, just as if it were any normal day. There was rejoicing when the first products came out and they had the bread in their hands. They started to work to revive the company as if it were their own. This was the beginning of an ongoing experience of reciprocal love that made us one family.

A few days later, we received the insurance claim for the fire. The owner of the house next to our bakery had claimed a high amount of damage, which was not acceptable to the insurance company. The owner asked some men to use violence in order to get the amount he wanted. After the first investigation had said that the fire was caused by a short circuit from our neighbor's house, the National Science Study Center said that we were responsible for the fire and that we should pay about \$2 million for the damage to that house and for the 24 injured persons.

Some people suggested to us that we could evade having to pay by telling a lie to the insurance company. But my wife and I considered this as a good opportunity to live our Christian faith and not go with the crowd. We entrusted everything to God and tried to live the present moment well. Eventually, we received a notice from the prosecutor's office that absolved us from any blame for the fire.

Amata: This moment of hardship helped me build a stronger unity with my husband. Before the fire, we did not see the gap that still existed between management and the employees, but afterwards reciprocal trust developed, and we became one family. We called the recovery from the fire the "Passover Project" because with the employees we were able to overcome this difficult moment, just as Moses did.

During the reconstruction and remodeling of the shop, each employee shared his or her ideas, and we came out with unexpected results. With joy, we were able to complete the shop and the factory in less than a year and to once again share part of our profits.

New products have been launched, and the staff spontaneously started to taste products of other companies and compare them to ours, even working overtime. As a result, our sales increased by 30%, and I see this as a fruit of our unity.

The relationships among the employees have changed as well. Before this, the production, sales and marketing departments were not very concerned with one another. If there was a special event, we used to hire part-time workers, but this year they said they would do everything themselves, and it became more successful than previous years.

Fedes: Some time ago, the whole country was surveying bakeries. When they saw the changes that occurred in our bakery in just a year, people came to visit us and wanted to know the secret of our success. We told them that we did not regard other bakeries as our competitors, but as persons to be loved. We try to love Christ in them. We also showed them our best-selling products and taught them how we make them.

We had received a prize from heaven — the hundredfold promised in the Gospel when we do the will of God in unity and with love for others. After 50 years of tradition, the Sung Sim Dang bakeshop now has 140 employees and many, many customers.

Captions:

Amata Kim and Fedes Lim achieved success with their company despite hardships

Daejon City, South Korea. One of the Sung Sim Dang bakeshops and restaurants in Korea. The company is one of 754 worldwide that follow EoC guidelines

50 years in business. Sung Sim Dang employees celebrate their achievements.