

Bread for the Hungry

Four small boys, no more than six or eight years old, frequently arrive at the Convent door in Mmakau: their feet are always bare and they have only one request – ‘Bread, please’. Then there are the regulars: pupils of Morekolodi Primary School, Tsogo High School and Mmakau Adult Education Centre. Education is the only hope for our children to be lifted out of poverty, but what use is education if children are hungry?

This is a pattern repeated in all our ministries: people have to be fed irrespective of what other kind of help they are given, and in the majority of cases, bread is the basic component of any meal or food parcel.

There is something sacred about bread: the Bible has numerous references to bread. Jesus declares himself ‘the Bread of Life’: he fed the multitudes with loaves and fishes. Every country has its own traditional forms of bread, guarded with pride and passed on from generation to generation. Bread takes many shapes and forms and is essential at any meal: simple or sophisticated, eaten by poor and wealthy. Unfortunately, here in South Africa, because of increasing prices, bread has become a luxury for those who have to count their cents.



There is a phrase well-known throughout the Continent: ‘Africa produces what it does not consume and consumes what it does not produce.’ Aware of the needs of our neighbours and the cost of bread, I decided to start a small bakery. My aims were to meet the needs of the people at a reasonable price, to train people in the art of baking, and to provide employment.

Winterveldt was in fact an ideal place to start: a rural community, high unemployment, little hope for young people, few facilities and far too much poverty. In addition, there was a basic infrastructure at Mercy Centre: a ‘beehive’, built by young men learning construction skills at the Centre and originally intended as a place for qualified artisans to set up shop and ply their trades, proved an ideal home for the bakery. For various reasons the original plan did not succeed.

In 2005, I applied to the National Lottery and was granted enough money to enable us to bring in water and electricity, tile the floors and purchase an oven and a mixer. Next step was to organize a training programme for future bakers. Johann Smit, a senior lecturer at Tshwane College in Pretoria, conducted a three-week intensive course during the December holidays. Three young men and two young women learned how to bake items that met the needs of those living around us. At the beginning, our customers were the local people, students attending the Centre, as well as patients coming to Mercy Clinic. Prices were kept as low as possible.

Then, in September 2006, a manageress was employed: Mrs Henrietta Muller whose enthusiasm, energy and competence proved invaluable. She visited local schools, spaza shops, informal traders at railway stations, pension depots and bus stops, to inform them of the latest service available to them.

Soon, more equipment was needed to meet growing demands. The National Development Agency (NDA) came to our assistance and we were able to buy more ovens as well as a delivery van. We can now bake a hundred loaves at a time, as well as scones and other popular items. We bake a minimum of three hundred loaves a day and make deliveries to ten schools, three spaza shops and several informal traders.





In 2007 we started to train young adults. To date twenty-seven trainees have completed the basic course: six of these have set up their own business in another part of Winterveldt. One of the ladies buys from us in bulk and sells in the nearby Slovoville settlement. Four people are employed full-time in the bakery where work starts at four o'clock every morning.

Our bakery is called Manna Bakery and we hope that its produce is proving as welcome and nourishing as the manna that fell in the desert.

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