



*Akari Kitayama (pseudonym), a woman in her 30s from the Tokyo metropolitan area*

## **Fired because of her religion**

**Interviewer** : Nice to meet you today. First of all, could you tell me how you came to believe (in the Family Federation)?

**Kitayama** : I am the second of six siblings and the second daughter, but I am a second generation in the faith because my mother joined the Family Federation after I was born. My mother invited me to attend a worship service for children at the Family Federation when I was in the early grades of elementary school and started going to church. However, after I went to high school, I was away from church for a while.

About 10 years after I stopped going to church, my father had a heart attack. He was in a very critical condition, but my mother wrote a wish paper (strips of paper with wishes written on it, which are dedicated to heaven) for him at the church. Then, my father's condition instantly improved and he recovered. He eventually returned to work, and the doctor was amazed at his recovery. After witnessing this miracle, my older and younger sisters, who had been away from church, started attending church again. I did not

immediately return to church after that miracle, but it seemed my sisters had been praying for me.

After some happenings in life, I decided to show up to church for the first time in a long while, which was about in 2015. It just so happened that it was the day of the Holy Wine Ceremony of special grace (forgiveness of sins). Once I received the holy wine, I felt as if a tight knot had been lifted from my chest, and I was able to go to church again.

**Interviewer** : Thank you very much. By the way, I heard that you were fired from your job due to a problem concerning your (religious) beliefs.

**Kitayama** : Yes, I work in the hospitality industry and 4 or 5 years ago I worked in a small store in downtown Tokyo. I worked with the male owner of that store and we used to get along well and had no problems. Initially, I felt comfortable working there. By the way, I have been keeping a faith journal (diary) to organize my thoughts and feelings. For a while, I used to bring my journal to work so I could write in it during breaks, but one day I left it at work and the owner read it. I had also written about some of my complaints about the workplace. After reading my journal, the owner sent me a long text message about what I had written, and that is when all kinds of trouble started.

Because I had written many things about my faith in my journal, the owner knew I was part of the Family Federation. He then started sending me bullying text messages on one of the message apps.

**Interviewer** : What kind of messages did he send you?

**Kitayama** : For example, he told me my attitude at work was bad and wrote long messages about it, or he told me I shouldn't be at the store and other things that made me want to quit. He kept sending such messages, one after the other. I felt he was trying to make me quit on my own, and I didn't want to cave in so I decided to continue working there.

The owner never said anything (bad) to me directly, but he always sent me messages outside of working hours. When it was bad, I was getting notifications on my phone

constantly, which was very tough to deal with. One day, an acquaintance whom both the owner and I knew (Ms. X, a customer of the store) and I went out for dinner. I found out that the owner had told Ms. X that I was from the Unification Church and that she shouldn't contact me anymore. Ms. X's husband was a Buddhist monk and she believes in her religion, so she understood me having faith in my religion. However, she had told me that the owner kept telling her about my faith. When she told me that, I understood that he wanted me to quit because of my religious beliefs.

After reading my journal, the owner continued to send text messages for about a month. During that time, we continued to work normally at the store. I also went to the union (labor union), but eventually, I was fired for what I was told as company reasons.

**Interviewer** : Were there any aftereffects from this incident?

**Kitayama** : I was fired from that store shortly before 2022, but after the incident with former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, two or three acquaintances (customers for the store) whom both the owner and I had known, sent me text messages telling me that he told them about the Unification Church and asked me what it was about. I had to explain my situation to each one of them. I am relieved that nothing bad came between us, but it was stressful knowing that the owner was still gossiping about my faith to others.

**Interviewer** : Lastly, please tell us how you feel now.

**Kitayama** : When I look back and read the messages the owner had sent me, they take me back to those days and it makes me feel sick. I am rather strong-minded, and I continued to work at my new job after this incident, but I think there are many people who hesitate to talk to someone or hold back and don't speak up when something similar occurs to them. Even if they're not fired like I was, I worry that more and more people are being bullied at work or even at school because of their religious beliefs.

**Interviewer** : Thank you very much for today.

