Twenty Years of Compassionate Medical Care p.47
New Tzu Chi Preschool Opens In California
Delivering Love and Hope to the Caribbean
There are many voices in the world.
If we listen carefully, we hear them as teachings.
When we hear praise, we must avoid feeling proud and arrogant,
so that ignorance will not flourish and afflictions will not accumulate.
When we hear harsh words, we must avoid holding on to them
and allowing them to damage our wisdom-life,
so that our roots of goodness will not be broken
and we will not hinder ourselves.

With a still mind, we are pure and free of greed,
content and grateful at all times.
With clear thoughts, we have open minds
and can accommodate and understand all things.
If we can eliminate doubts and negative views,
we will not be troubled by conflict.
We can transform impure sounds into pure ones,
and negative affinities into positive ones.
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Happiness from a Sincere, Reverent Heart

As we go about our everyday life, are we joyful and understanding toward everyone and everything? Do we face everything with a genuinely sincere and respectful attitude? That is what we practice for. We want to let go of afflictions so we can always abide in a peaceful mindset.

Usually, we tend to approach things with a discriminating mind, full of notions of what is good and bad. Being in this frame of mind, we react easily and become judgmental. We fail to take into consideration the many principles at work which are hidden from our perception.

Seeing the Wonder in Everything

All around us, everything is operating based on laws and principles which are very deep and profound. Truth is out there all of the time, but its richness and wonder are often invisible. With a heart of sincerity and reverence, we can discover the Dharma within our everyday life and begin to see the wonder in the world.

Everything we encounter in this world is a coming together of many elements. For example, take the flowers on this table before me. Where did these flowers come from? They started out as a seed. For the seed to grow, it needed to have favorable soil, water, sunlight, and air. All these elements had to come together in just the right way for the seed to grow into a plant that eventually bloomed with flowers.

Without these elements, there is no flower, only flower seed. They all go into making the flower; the flower is therefore a composite of all these different elements. Behind the flower that we see, there are invisible but wondrous causes and conditions coming together.

This is also true for the table here in front of me. Being made of wood, we can see that this wood used to be a tree. Where did this tree come from? It also started out as a seed. With the proper soil, sunlight, water, and movement of air, the seed was able to germinate and grow into a seedling, then a sapling, and eventually into a full-grown tree. That is how we come to have wood to make into tables and chairs, and for the construction of our buildings which provide us shelter and comfort in daily living.

Every kind of plant, whether grass, bushes, or trees, is like this—coming into being through the interplay of different factors. Actually, every material thing follows this principle, from a seed to endless outcomes. The principles at work are deep and profound, the existence of everything wondrous. So miraculous is the wonder of existence that it is often beyond our understanding or imagination. Explaining
the working mechanism behind it is a rather colossal undertaking. Truly, there is so much in life that we do not yet understand.

Hence, we need to treat everything with the utmost respect and sincerity. Having a heart of sincerity and reverence will allow us to see the deeper principle in things and elevate our wisdom. This opens and expands our hearts, making us more tolerant, understanding, happy, and capable.

**The Dharma in Respecting Others**

If we can begin to recognize the wonder in all the principles and mechanisms behind everything around us, we will realize how little we know, how much we need others to help us do all the things that we cannot do, and how much we need to respect people for their understanding of the profound principles that enable them to possess the skills they have and to master things we do not understand.

For instance, when a technical glitch occurs during one of my talks, such as with the sound broadcasting or with the screens that show the text I am discussing, I need to look for help to fix the problem. This shows that this is something I don’t know about. It is an expertise I have yet to master. Oftentimes, the person I ask to help me will say, “I’m not knowledgeable in this, let me go find so-and-so who knows how to fix it.” She has to go find the person who has expertise in this area. When that person comes, all she has to do is to make a small adjustment and suddenly, everything is fixed. How did she do this? She has an understanding of the matter that I do not possess.

But at the same time, this person’s understanding may also be limited to such technical repairs. If I asked her to help revise a draft report, she would say, “Wait, let me find so-and-so. She is better at this.”

How much do we really know? Our individual wisdom and understanding are limited; we alone cannot do everything under the sun. Everyone contributes to make the world run smoothly. We depend on each other. That is why we need to respect everyone for the unique understanding and skills they have.

This is what we need to practice mindfully—learning to see in everyday life the wondrous principles of Dharma at work and to face all people and matters with a sincere and reverent heart. When we do this, we will become more tolerant and understanding. In our hearts, we will always abide in great joy. This is to touch Dharma in daily life and dispel our afflictions. So, please do practice mindfully to keep a sincere, reverent heart always, toward everyone and everything.
When Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi in 1966, she fashioned coin banks from bamboo and asked her lay followers—thirty housewives—to save NT$0.50 (about US$0.02) from their grocery money every day to help the poor.

One follower asked, “Can’t I just donate NT$15 each month?” But Master refused. She explained that though the amount was the same, it was important to give rise to a kind thought each and every day.

From these humble beginnings forty-seven years ago, Tzu Chi has grown into a global NGO with ten million volunteers and donors in over fifty countries, because it collects not only donations, but also kind hearts.

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
909.447.7799 | www.us.tzuchi.org
Over the past quarter century, ever since Tzu Chi volunteers started carrying the Tzu Chi spirit overseas from Hualien, Dharma Master Cheng Yen has often reminded us to connect with our new communities so that we can make a difference locally, wherever we happen to be.

This is often easier said than done. Whether here in the United States, or in dozens of other countries all around the world, local Tzu Chi chapters have usually been started by immigrants without deep roots in their new communities. Yet, despite the difficulties, these volunteers have succeeded in making connections and making a difference, often in large part thanks to the help and support of local partners who share the same goal of helping others.

Among Tzu Chi’s many rewarding partnerships, our affinity with the American Red Cross stands out as particularly noteworthy. Whenever a disaster strikes, Tzu Chi volunteers are able to carry out disaster assessment thanks largely to the Red Cross’s support. When cases arise that the Red Cross cannot take on, they are often referred to Tzu Chi.

Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, which has just celebrated its twentieth anniversary in the United States, also partners with countless healthcare providers, local governments, charities—more than I can count. It is only by bringing together the different strengths of all these organizations that so many patients have been treated over the past two decades.

Following the major rice distributions in Haiti this past October, I am reminded of a particularly memorable partnership Tzu Chi volunteers formed with Brazilian peacekeeping troops in Port-au-Prince after the 2010 earthquake. Then, as now, it would have been impossible for Tzu Chi to carry out a relief distribution without the support and protection of UN peacekeeping troops, so they were always by our side. After one distribution, an officer told us how moved he was by what he saw. As a soldier, he had considered his job to be riot control, so he always kept the local Haitians at arm’s length with a wary eye. But when he saw Tzu Chi volunteers treat each care recipient with the spirit of gratitude, respect, and love by bowing, hugging, and showing utmost respect, he was amazed to see smiles return to their faces. He could see that this helped them forget their pain even for just a moment. His mindset changed from riot control to humanitarian relief, and his approach to the locals changed with it. Two weeks later, he and his troops even held their own relief distribution in the Tzu Chi style.

As Tzu Chi will soon be celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in the United States, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the charities, churches, healthcare providers, educational organizations, chambers of commerce, government agencies, and all of our partners all across the country for their support in helping us reach this major milestone. I hope that each of these collaborations will continue to blossom, so that we may learn from and support one another as we continue to help people in our shared communities for many years to come.

At the same time, I would like to thank all our tireless volunteers and gracious donors for bringing Tzu Chi to the quarter-century mark. With all your support, we will continue to relieve suffering together with the spirit of gratitude, respect, and love, and we will continue to help people understand and experience the joy of giving.
Together We're Stronger
Community Partnerships
People have different talents; organizations have different strengths. Nationwide, Tzu Chi volunteers collaborate with many partners whose strengths complement their own, including individuals, charities, churches, schools, governments, and NGOs.

Through these collaborations, they reach more people, touch more lives, and accomplish more good than any could on their own. In the following pages, Tzu Chi volunteers and organizational partners share a small sample of these stories from all across the country.
Relieving Suffering Together after Sandy

Fang Yuan Chou | Translated by Jeff Steward

Though a terrible tragedy, Hurricane Sandy has provided the opportunity for communities to draw closer together and new partnerships to form.

Though a year has passed since Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast, one can still see Tzu Chi volunteers out on the streets of Brooklyn, visiting the homes of Hurricane Sandy survivors to provide them continued personal care.

In the aftermath of the historic devastation wrought by the storm, Tzu Chi volunteers have ventured more deeply than ever before into the most vulnerable communities and built bridges with local organizations, joining hand-in-hand to show care to those who need it most.

After Hurricane Sandy made landfall in October 2012 and tens of thousands of houses were submerged in a flash, local Tzu Chi volunteers began mobilizing relief efforts the very next day. To overcome the difficulties of connecting survivors to relief goods over such a wide area of desolation, volunteers utilized every available channel, working together with many local organizations and individuals to get relief supplies into the hands of survivors with utmost speed.

On December 10, 2012, for Tzu Chi’s first major aid distribution, volunteers relied upon Roger Gendron, president of the New Hamilton Beach Civic Association, and his wife, Holly, for assistance. They both knew the area like the back of their hands, and with their assistance in developing information, the aid distribution went off without a hitch. In the months that followed, New York volunteers held twenty-four more distributions, none of which could have been accomplished without the help of local individuals and organizations.

From December 21, 2012, volunteers’ focus shifted to assisting undocumented immigrants and others unable to qualify for governmental or other aid. To accomplish their goals, volunteers began collaborating with the Council of Peoples Organization (COPO), the Shorerefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, and Make the Road New York (MRNY), among others, in order to develop a list of names for debit card distributions and recruit bilingual volunteers who could provide translation during the donation process.

Though equally affected by the storm, many individuals who lacked legal status found themselves in constant fear of seeking aid from governmental organizations, so receiving a debit card from Tzu Chi was like a welcome rain after a long drought. Even so, many remained suspicious of this unfamiliar organization. Thankfully, as Tzu Chi volunteers sat alongside volunteers from local organizations that they already knew and trusted, their remaining doubts were swept away.

Shirley, an afterschool tutoring program manager for Shorefront YM-YWHA, is an extremely open and candid person and a trusted friend of many affected households. "You cannot imagine how difficult their lives are," she told volunteers, explaining the terror...
that many undocumented immigrants feel even within their own homes. “In their hometowns in Central and South America, their experience was that every time a family member dealt with a government official, that person would never return home. Even when federal emergency relief supplies were provided to them, when I took them to receive these supplies, they were still terrified. Sometimes a group of people would first send out a delegate, as the others hid until they could verify that nothing would happen. Only then would they dare to show their faces.”

In order to reach this vulnerable community, Tzu Chi volunteers quickly realized that volunteers who spoke their language and understood their culture would be invaluable. As a result, the New York office began a Community Outreach Associate training program in February, in the hope of developing more volunteers of all ethnicities to work together and reach more communities for long-term care.

The Community Outreach Associate program is a pioneering undertaking and a milestone of Tzu Chi in the United States. Sixteen people enrolled in the first round of the program, with five completing training to become the first Associates. Two of these five had been personally affected by the disaster. Many others were introduced by the Council of Peoples Organization on Coney Island. Two more individuals joined during the second round of training.

On February 23, 2013, when Tzu Chi volunteers organized an aid distribution on Staten Island in association with Make the Road New York, the new Community Outreach Associates had their first outing. They wore yellow Tzu Chi volunteer vests as they spoke with disaster survivors in fluent Spanish, Russian, and
Urdu. With an opportunity to receive aid in their own mother tongues, aid recipients were fully at ease; their eyes exuded warmth and trust.

John Reyes is one of the Community Outreach Associates. After the hurricane, his home was destroyed and he was out of work. Just when he had given up hope, his friend suggested that he visit Tzu Chi for help. When John stepped into the Chinatown office and felt the warm care of the volunteers, he decided to join them to help others. He said, “As long as I can make someone feel even a small part of the warmth I felt from the Tzu Chi volunteers, it will be worth it.”

Susana, a university student, is also from a home affected by the disaster. She lives in Brooklyn and volunteered during the aid distribution for undocumented immigrants at the Shorefront YM-YWHA. Also helping Tzu Chi serve at the Shorefront YM-YWHA was Rosa Du, who not only speaks English, but is also fluent in Chinese and Spanish. Before major aid distributions, she and other Shorefront YM-YWHA staff visited disaster-affected families to conduct home visits and assessments. As she found the role of a Tzu Chi Community Outreach Associate similar to what she was already doing, she participated in the Community Outreach Associate program and even became a Tzu Chi employee in August.

Amir Sajjad, a physician from Pakistan, was introduced to Tzu Chi through COPO just a month after he arrived in New York, and he immediately joined the Community Outreach Associate program. Dr. Sajjad first came into contact with Tzu Chi five years ago during Tzu Chi’s earthquake relief in Pakistan. He had been assisting disaster survivors as a physician when the Tzu Chi tents he saw in the disaster area left a very deep impression on him. He never expected that five years later he would be living in the United States or that just days off the plane he would have an opportunity to travel with Tzu Chi volunteers to Brooklyn to visit Pakistani families affected by Sandy.

While Hurricane Sandy caused severe damage on a massive scale, it also provided an opportunity for Tzu Chi volunteers to cultivate close ties with many community organizations, creating strong mutual partnerships to better serve the community. Furthermore, Tzu Chi volunteers, by collaborating with Community Outreach Associates from various ethnicities, have been able to enter into vulnerable local communities to carry out case visits, coming in contact with undocumented immigrants otherwise too scared to seek out help. Through these valuable partnerships with both organizations and individuals, volunteers are able to serve more than ever before.

For more on Tzu Chi’s Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, please see Issue 36 (Summer 2013).
Finding the Spirit of Awakening in Prison  

Jordan Van Voast

In Seattle, Washington, volunteers work with the county to support rehabilitation through self-improvement.

The more mistrust we feel, the less confidence we have.” The young man in the corner listens thoughtfully as volunteer Angela Wan explains the meaning behind the Jing Si Aphorism to him and the classroom: “If our heart is always suspicious towards others, then our world becomes small and closed due to our lack of trust in others. We lose the ability to see our limitless potential, preoccupied by our fear and anxiety.

The rest of the men read their aphorisms one by one, and we all reflect on the deeper meaning together. One of the men asks, “What is wisdom?” Wisdom is the ability to see things clearly without fear, and as a result, we spontaneously open our loving heart to all beings. But before we can see and experience that directly, first we need to empty our mind of all its garbage and superficial thinking. Shall we practice doing that with some silent meditation on the breath?

The Tzu Chi meditation program at King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention in Seattle, Washington, arose out of an existing partnership between Tzu Chi and the Community Center for Alternative Programs (CCAP). Starting in 2007, volunteer Karl Su had been leading GED classes to help individuals with minor criminal convictions to work towards their high school diploma. King County had previously contracted with a paid service provider to offer meditation classes—so they were already familiar with the benefits of meditation—but that particular program was curtailed during a round of budget cuts during the last economic downturn. When Karl approached the CCAP Director and suggested a meditation class, the response was very favorable. In January 2011, Tzu Chi began offering classes on the first and third Tuesday of every month, alternating between women’s and men’s groups. Three years later, the program is still going strong.
At 2 PM, I am sitting at the head of the CCAP conference room table, along with seven ladies. The ladies are joking with each other: “Is this medication class, or meditation?” Over two years volunteering at the center, I’ve learned to roll with the street humor. One of the first principles of leading meditation groups, especially in this context, is the importance of establishing a base of friendship and care.

These women are here for rehabilitation, and I am here to help. CCAP is a jail diversion program, tasked with reducing crime and transforming lives without incarceration. Offenders of low-level, non-violent crimes must report to the center during the week to attend life skills classes like this one, and then they return home each evening. But many challenges still confront participants. Unless there are changes in their mental and emotional attitudes, they remain likely to repeat the same mistakes, which bring the same negative consequences—the downward spiral of repeated offenses, punishment from society, inability to find employment, poverty, and more crime. Relying on the bodhisattva example provided by Master Cheng Yen and the Buddha, it is our job to help them find that spark of compassion and love already within them, to help them reverse their downward slide and instead work towards realizing their unlimited potential.

“So, let’s get started everyone. Today we are going to practice a little meditation. But first, I’d like to introduce myself—I’m Jordan and I’m a volunteer for the Tzu Chi Foundation.” One of the participants immediately asks, “What’s Tzu Chi? What does that mean?” “Okay, Chinese is not my first language so I’m probably mispronouncing it, but Tzu means compassion, and Chi means relief. Tzu Chi is an organization devoted to making the world a better place by serving humanity and the planet with great compassion. Often, it involves going into disaster zones and providing immediate relief—like in Haiti after the earthquake, or New York after Hurricane Sandy. But there are so many areas of need in our society.

“We all have great potential to serve humanity, and all life on Earth, to make our world a peaceful place. So it’s up to each one of us to make that happen. We might not feel like we have much to contribute right now, but actually we all have the potential to be a great saint like Mother Theresa or Gandhi. But in order for that to happen, we need to begin working on ourselves, cultivating our minds, by removing the weeds of negative emotions and attitudes and gradually planting the seeds of positive mental qualities. In time, our life can become a garden of beautiful flowers and thereby inspire many others.

“But first, we need to learn to quiet our minds, to look inside of ourselves and see what is there without judgment or self-condemnation. Because we need to see our shortcomings before we can remove them, and this is a long-term project which requires gentle love and patience towards ourselves. So, we begin by learning to quiet our minds, focusing on the breath, observing the moment to moment physical sensations of our breath as they flow in and out of our body. We train our mind to focus
only on the breathing: ignoring sounds, ignoring thoughts when they arise, recognizing sleepiness if it starts to arise.”

I push the meditation timer app on my mobile phone and a pleasant sounding chime begins the meditation. “Scan through your body, releasing tension—your face. Jaw. Shoulders. Torso. Legs. Feet. Toes. Arms. Hands. Fingers. Now observe the breathing.” I stop speaking and let the silence deepen in the room. Most of the ladies now have their heads resting on the table, but a few are still sitting straight in silence. It’s not easy, but with all the potential, it’s our job not to give up on anyone, even when any sign of progress seems faint. Learning to meditate seems easy when you read it in a book. But to establish a regular practice is difficult even in the best of circumstances. These ladies, living in an unstable world of broken relationships, turmoil, and medication, have huge hurdles to overcome. But the Buddha teaches us that no karmic seed ever goes to waste. Whatever positive seed of goodness is planted in the mind will eventually bear fruit, so I continue to cast seeds, build relationships, and work on myself—the most important job of all if we wish to help others.

“Do you meditate every day?” one of the participants asks me. “I try my best,” I answer. “That’s all that any one of us can ask of ourselves, don’t you think?”

Clear away the haze covering the mind to reveal one’s beautiful nature.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Eliminating Borders through 21st Century Education

Scot R. Burkholder

The principal of New Jersey’s Jefferson Elementary reflects on his school’s rewarding partnership with Tainan Tzu Chi Elementary.

This story begins with the amazing work of three volunteers: Bright Lin, and Edward and Angela Chu. These three dedicated volunteers, along with many others who accompanied them, had been coming to Jefferson Elementary year after year to donate school supplies and uniforms. Entering my second year at the school as the new principal, I was determined to show them our appreciation and set a new course where we would return their kindness with a gesture of learning more about their organization and culture.

The first step in this mission was to help raise funds for Tzu Chi’s “Japan Earthquake Relief” fundraising drive. This was particularly special as the student council at Jefferson, led by Melissa Logan and Janet Banks, selected this relief mission and decided to raise funds for Tzu Chi over other possible partnerships because the students wanted to help the organization responsible for all the uniforms being donated to the school.

Next, the deeper partnership began to take root by a simple invitation extended to the volunteers to join our annual back to school night for our students and parents to put a face on the source of so many gifts to our families. After a few follow-up visits, I asked the volunteers...
Jefferson students greet their Tainan counterparts during the video conference on March 28, 2013. Photo: Bright Lin

to attend a Parent Teacher Association meeting where I had two things to give to the group. The first item we gave Edward, Angela, and Bright was a small token of our appreciation: Community Service Award plaques commemorating their wonderful support of our school. The second thing I gave them was a request to help us build a long-distance, lasting partnership with a school across the globe. It was a request that would take over ten months to develop and countless hours of phone calls and emails to make that idealistic dream into reality. So the journey of a thousand miles begins with one first step.

A few weeks after that initial request, Angela called suggesting that she believed that a Tzu Chi elementary school in Tainan was interested, but that there would be many approvals to secure and detailed plans to make before the idea would be accepted and become a reality. Working with teachers Pepper Stackhouse and Isabella DeSantis, I established a proposal where the schools would share a series of three letters (introduction, information about their school, and some background on the students’ countries) and establish a shared blog.

Over in Tainan, Principal Zeng, working with Chen Tian He and English teacher Huang, developed a program in the English studies course at Tzu Chi Elementary that would have students develop their English language skills through writing letters, reading materials sent from Jefferson, and posting cultural and environmental projects developed through their studies. After several rounds of discussion and approval from the respective boards, the program was officially off and running.

Pepper Stackhouse, a teacher at Jefferson, developed and designed the blog with help from Angela and Edward’s translation in December 2011. Mrs. Stackhouse paid close attention in developing the pictures and language of the blog to show respect for Far East cultures and traditions. A milestone was achieved when the blog was officially launched on December 21, 2011, with letters of introduction from the Jefferson students to their classmates over ten thousand miles away. The blog was an instant hit with both school communities as the site was visited over 1,400 times in the first month with an incredible 561 views of the student letters in the first week alone.

The first set of Tzu Chi Elementary student letters arrived shortly thereafter and was met with enthusiasm and excitement by Jefferson students. The letters on both sides of the world immediately conveyed a strong message that students everywhere are excited and nervous about the same topics and ideas. Students shared that they are excited about making new friends, like to go to the movies, and don’t really like doing homework. For the teachers, the two most profound similarities are that both schools are dual-language schools promoting the importance of bilingual education (Chinese and English in Tainan, Spanish and English in Plainfield) and the fact that students in both schools have a deep desire to improve their academic standing through exploring new topics through this reading and writing project.
Teachers, students, and volunteers participate in the first conference on December 20, 2012. Photo: Bright Lin

After a Chinese New Year celebration hosted by Tzu Chi volunteers at Jefferson, one fourth grader commented, “The assembly and our blog are great because we learned about their traditions. We did a cool video where we wished them Happy New Year in Chinese and English, and they sent one back. I think we should do another video showing them more of our school and Plainfield.” One video from Tainan detailing the traditions of their school—especially the part where the honor roll students are honored to be selected to serve food and clean the school—caught the attention of the Jefferson students in an inspiring way. Our students even felt that our school could learn something from our new classmates. “I would be honored to clean the school in Tainan, because it means you are a good student,” added a fifth-grade honor roll student at Jefferson. “They go to school longer than we do every day, but they seem to get a great education and have good traditions.”

After a short review period at both schools, a plan was introduced to host three to four video conferences and to work on projects related to the environment and the two countries’ governments that would be shared during these conferences and on the blog. As the students continued to share ideas and photos on the blog, the groundwork was now established for the bigger initiative of sharing cultural and educational projects in a medium which would allow students not only to interact, but also to explain their work and ask questions of each other. In the lead-up to the first scheduled video conference, there was another surge of blog traffic, resulting in over 6,400 total visits in its first year of existence. The blog even went global as students in over twenty-eight countries viewed the work of our students.

Finally, after much planning and practice, the first video conference was held on December 20, 2012, to celebrate the expansion of our school’s partnership almost a year to the day from when the first letters were exchanged between the schools. Principal Zeng shared, “We are pleased to know there is another school on the other side of the world also working diligently for the hope and benefit of their students. For our students, it’s broadening their horizons and expanding their understanding of people. This type of partnership is invaluable to our ability to make a difference in the way our children see the world.”
Tainan Elementary students perform the sign language song “Love and Care for All.”

Photo: Tainan Tzu Chi volunteers

When the morning finally arrived for the conference, the Jefferson students arrived at school excitedly at 6:45 AM. The simple fact that the students would come to school over an hour early on the day before the holiday break proved just how motivated and committed the students were to meet their new friends from the Far East! At the onset of the conference, students were nervous and began by introducing themselves before sharing some facts about their school, classes, and interests outside of school. The discussion became warmer as the students were presented the opportunity to interview each other and ask questions.

The video conference went so well that two more conferences were agreed to and a plan to include more academic discussions on the second call was put into place. As the date approached for the second conference in March 2013, both schools had such an overwhelming request by students to participate that students were placed on a wait list for the third conference. Topics during the second conference included the countries’ respective governments, cultural traditions, and historical sites. Then, to teach the students critical thinking skills, both schools allowed students to ask follow-up questions after the presentations. The second conference also included new classes and staff members who participated as the partnership continued to grow. The students’ work was tremendous.

To date, the blog has been visited over 9,800 times by people in twenty-nine countries. The blog contains seventy-five postings of student work containing historical, educational, or cultural information shared by the students and staff. Including the opening letters and a package of postcards and gifts sent from Tainan to Plainfield, the two schools have exchanged personalized messages on ten different occasions. The video conferences, with two held already and more scheduled, have brought all of these sharing opportunities together and made the students and staff members at the two schools truly feel connected.

How far this ongoing relationship’s impact will extend into the students’ future lives and careers is still unknown, but I personally believe that in this world where it is possible to share cultural and educational information with a school ten thousand miles away and see that we all have interests and dreams that make us innately human, it is hard as a student not to begin to believe that you can do anything in this life and that with a little work and imagination you can achieve your dreams. This is exactly as Master Cheng Yen says, “Do not underestimate yourself, for human beings have unlimited potential.”

My thanks go out to all the tireless volunteers, teachers, students, and parents in both countries for their hard work, dedication, and caring about this project to ensure that what was once a goal has become a reality.

The students’ blog is accessible at http://tainanjefferson.wordpress.com/

To seize the present is to seize the future.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
My narrative starts in early 2011 when the Tzu Chi Foundation brought some local volunteers from South Africa to present at a panel at the United Nations—where I have been a representative for non-governmental organizations for more than fifteen years. The touching stories of how the volunteers came to be part of the Tzu Chi work and the description of the community centers with sustainable gardens followed by the announcement that the Tzu Chi Foundation would build thirteen community centers in the next three years made me say, “I want to see that!”

Thanks to the generosity of the Tzu Chi Foundation, in October 2012 my travelling companion, and the main Tzu Chi representative at the UN, Austin Chu and I stepped off the plane in Durban, South Africa, and into the diligent care of Michael Pan, head of Tzu Chi programs in Africa and, as I found out, also a wise and funny comedian.

Michael wasted no time in starting our education with a visit to our first community center. Like so many Tzu Chi sponsored actions—be they schools, community centers, or home visits—one is likely to travel far and leave behind any hint of a paved road, instead turning onto rocky, rutted paths to reach areas where the poor, marginalized, sick, and disabled of all ages live.
At the community center, there were a couple dozen children sitting on red plastic chairs under the cheerful eyes of Fikili, a local Tzu Chi volunteer since 1995. It had rained heavily the night before and the semi-sheltered kitchen was damp, so there was no plan afoot to prepare the daily meal to be distributed to the many orphans living in the neighborhood, but Michael insisted that this was unacceptable and that the children must be fed every day.

Michael explained that there were many, many orphans in neighborhoods like this. Although the government provided a small stipend for families that took them in, this money was not necessarily allocated toward providing the children food. This meal provided by the Tzu Chi volunteers was likely to be the only meal of the day for these children—a situation we were to encounter often as we traveled. A first lesson I learned at this community center, which was to serve me well throughout our trip, was patience. Things do not develop at the breakneck speed we have in New York. As we waited for the food to be prepared, word must have gotten around that the Tzu Chi team was cooking, for the room filled with more children as well as students in their school uniforms and mothers with small babies. Children sang and danced for us and everyone had an eager smile.

The next day we began a three-day seminar for 190 Tzu Chi volunteers from five countries—South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Swaziland. As a devoted admirer of Master Cheng Yen and the Tzu Chi philosophy of living and giving, what I took away from these meetings was the urgent need for each person to cultivate an inner character based on love and compassion as the stepping stone for reaching out to others. I was impressed when local volunteers shared with us some of the outreach they have been doing in their neighborhoods and the enthusiastic reception of their work. One thing the trip affirmed for me was that a critical element to the success of the Tzu Chi Foundation’s many projects in Africa is that local people feel an ownership of their efforts.

We left Durban en route to Johannesburg, stopping along the way at Ladysmith, Maseru, and Bloemfontein to see a sampling of the many and varied local Tzu Chi projects. I was awed by the fact that many Tzu Chi volunteers had been working continually in the challenging environments of South Africa and Lesotho ever since they immigrated many years earlier. I came to know what I call the “Tzu Chi glow”—a radiant smile that both recipients and members of the Tzu Chi family perpetually seem to have.
that to me evinces a full heart. Never did I feel this more than with Josephina, a woman living in a modest shack outside Maseru, Lesotho. She was paralyzed from the waist down, her husband had left her, and she was bringing up two children with some assistance from Tzu Chi and through a small garden that she tended on a makeshift plastic stool. She greeted us at the entrance to her home with a big smile and on our departure offered us each a big jar of canned peaches, which must have represented a huge part of her family’s reserve food. It is small wonder that Jennifer Chen, a Vice Director of Tzu Chi Africa who also owns a large garment manufacturing plant, told us, “Tzu Chi is my life.” This was a common sentiment from many of the devoted Tzu Chi volunteers I met in Africa.

Our final day was spent in Johannesburg where our learning continued. Ken Tsai, another Vice Director and one of many deeply committed younger leaders, explained that what worked in one locale was not necessarily successful in another. Nonetheless, the basic fabric of the Tzu Chi way—caring personal outreach and contact with those in the greatest need—was profusely evident in all we saw.

Austin and I were richly blessed on this trip by the overwhelming attention and kindness lavished upon us from beginning to end. I must especially thank two more Vice Directors—Cecilia Huang, who accompanied us for most of our journey and made sure everything was always perfect, and Jolie Huang, who showed us the enormous potential of the plastic bottles which can bring light to homes where there is no electricity available!

It was moving to see the way that personal commitment has sparked the great success of Tzu Chi programs in South Africa. Hsieh hsieh! Thank you! 🌟

Travel the world on foot; make a difference in the world by hand.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

A Liter of Light

In South Africa, where the disparity between rich and poor is very high, many of the haves- nots live in small, illegal shanties—little more than several sheets of reclaimed corrugated metal pieced together into ten-foot-by-ten-foot boxes. With the exception of a few small holes bored into the metal walls, residents live in complete darkness with no power, windows, or air circulation.

Now, inspired by the MyShelter Foundation’s “Liter of Light” project in the Philippines and Tzu Chi’s spirit of “turning garbage into gold,” Tzu Chi volunteers in Bloemfontein, South Africa, are taking plastic bottles and turning them into eco-friendly sources of light.

Austin Chu

With a few simple materials and tools, volunteers can install this light source by setting a bottle filled with water halfway into a hole on the roof or wall, such that the top half of the bottle harnesses the natural energy of the sun, refracts the rays through the water in the bottle, and thus brings light to the inside of the home. In total, the installation process takes no more than thirty minutes.

It is the mission of Tzu Chi volunteers to bring hope and light to those lost in darkness, and with innovation and perspiration, volunteers in South Africa are doing just that.

All photos: Austin Chu
The Key to Freedom

Part 1

Dong-Chang & Hui-Yuh Shiue | Translated by Colin Legerton

As Burmese refugees try to navigate their new lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, they can rely on Tzu Chi and partnering organizations for support.

Local Burmese students take part in Tzu Chi’s New Year Blessing Ceremony. Photo: Tienai Lin
Burma, also known as Myanmar, achieved its independence in 1948, but it has been racked by internal conflicts ever since. Caught in the crossfire of long-standing violence, millions have chosen to flee their homeland for safety and freedom, most often to neighboring Thailand. The United Nations estimates that 150,000 refugees currently reside in just ten camps along the border, some of which have been in steady operation for three decades. Many more live in similar camps in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and elsewhere.

Since 2001, the United States has taken in approximately one hundred thousand Burmese refugees, of whom about fifteen thousand live in Indiana, primarily in Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. Most arrived from the refugee camps in Thailand, where some of the younger refugees spent their entire formative years. Before they immigrated to the United States, they had no sense of what the outside world was like.

Tzu Chi Indianapolis volunteers first learned about this local refugee community in summer 2009, when volunteer KaiLin Liu, a graduate student at Indiana University, shared about her experience interning at a local organization serving refugees. We decided to visit an apartment building where many of the families live to learn about their living situation and difficulties. Most families had six or eight people crammed in small two-room apartments. They couldn’t speak a word of English or even read the alphabet.

Thankfully, we met Rita, who was herself a refugee. Because of her English skills, she had worked as a translator for the United Nations in the refugee camps in Thailand. After moving to Indiana and finding work with a Catholic charity, she continued to use her spare time to serve her community. Her story was both moving and inspirational. With Rita’s help, we visited several refugee families. We learned that it was their first winter in Indiana after a lifetime in the tropics, so they were in desperate need of winter clothing and other items. After urgently gathering supplies, we held our first winter distribution on November 14, 2009—a warm event that provided relief to seventy families.

At the distribution site, new volunteer Grace Tsai was especially moved. “They were nearly the same age as me, and they had brought their young toddlers to this free country just the same as I had, but they couldn’t speak even a word of English, so I couldn’t even imagine the difficulties that were still awaiting them. Then I thought about how fortunate I am, not having to worry about finances, and I truly understood what it means to ‘realize your own blessings by witnessing the suffering of others.’ This was my first time volunteering with Tzu Chi, but I feel that it is the beginning of my Tzu Chi life, because I too have the ability to help others.”

In the days after this first distribution, we continued to gather clothing and other relief goods for families unable to attend the distribution. One day we noticed a young mother carrying her two small children; she wore just a thin dress and slippers despite the snow. The sight was hard to bear. We continued to provide care for individual cases like hers all the way until spring arrived in April 2010, and we have done the same each winter since.

Through our visits, we came to learn that many of the high school students had never encountered computers before. So, in March 2010, we started a five-month computer training course to teach basic computer and software use and even some troubleshooting. In addition, we also helped these students learn basic English for everyday life. Several months after the courses began, thanks to the generosity of some volunteers’ employers, we were even able to donate nine old computers to refugee students.

Most families had six or eight people crammed in small two-room apartments. They couldn’t speak a word of English or even read the alphabet.
College student Andy Chu led the computer classes. Close in age to the students, and also very energetic and knowledgeable of computers, he soon became very close with his students. As they learned to use technology, it even helped them study English and other subjects more effectively. None of the students who received a computer had ever had a computer before, so they were very excited and grateful for these new treasured possessions and this new knowledge.

One of the young computer tutors, fourteen-year-old volunteer Benjamin Huang, wrote in June 2010, “I have had many positive experiences by teaching computer skills to Burmese immigrants. When I was helping Vincent Shiu to teach them how to use email, I gave them time to explore email features after I finished explaining the usage. All of a sudden they were very interested in something they have never seen before; I have never seen them smile so much! That day I walked out of the office grinning from ear to ear, knowing I had just taught them something they can use in everyday life. Nothing brings me more satisfaction than successfully helping others.”

Before long, we learned that they also needed help with math, so Victoria Chiu, a young volunteer from Argentina, suggested that we offer math tutoring as well. In September 2010, we started holding Saturday morning tutoring sessions each week at the Indianapolis Service Center. At first, students would bring their math homework from school and ask questions, but we quickly realized this high school math was far beyond their abilities. They still had problems with basic arithmetic, so volunteer Hsinghsing Chen, a retired high school math teacher, along with volunteers Dennis and Rainbow Tschang, helped design a curriculum to teach addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. In the process, we also started tutoring English conversation. Many high school students joined in to help with the English, which also helped the refugee students make new friends and better understand the teen culture at school.

One of the students, Shaw Mo, is a little older than the others and speaks better English. She is clearly one of the leaders and also one of the first to attend Tzu Chi’s tutoring program. A very compassionate person, Shaw Mo often volunteers to translate for her classmates. In August 2013, Shaw Mo even attended Tzu Chi volunteer training and put on the gray volunteer shirt as the first seed of Tzu Chi in the Indianapolis Burmese community. She hopes to spread Master Cheng Yen’s Dharma and Tzu Chi’s philosophy in the Burmese community and even go to Hualien to meet the Master.

This tutoring program has moved and inspired many local volunteers, including James Fung, who has been consistently supporting these students with a patient, loving heart. His interaction with these students has brought him to a greater understanding of Buddhist Dharma, and his ability to inspire others has led several high school students to become volunteer tutors. I believe they are truly coming to understand what it means to know their blessings, cherish their blessings, and create more blessings.

After four years of winter distributions and tutoring sessions, you can see the students’ faces brimming with confident smiles. Not only have they been guided with gratitude, they in turn have moved us volunteers. The hours that volunteers dedicate each week are few, but we receive so much in return. 🌱

Acts of generosity are perceived as helping others when we ourselves are the true beneficiaries.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Hearing the call for math tutors in 2010, my wife immediately said, “My husband’s an engineer. Sign him up!” Unbeknownst to both of us, in that moment we committed half of every Saturday for the foreseeable future.

Just a couple miles from our Tzu Chi Indianapolis Service Center, eighty or ninety Burmese refugee families, many straight out of refugee camps in Thailand, live in a large run-down apartment complex. Their apartments are poorly insulated, poorly maintained, and infested with pests and rodents. It is not uncommon to find families of eight or more living in a single two-bedroom apartment.

“Education is the key not only to success, but also to freedom.”

The federal assistance program administered through resettlement agencies provides these families with four months of support, including food stamps, English classes, job placement and training, and medical assistance. But four months is not enough time to become self-sufficient, so new immigrants must rely on the community for support.

The local First Baptist Church has been especially instrumental in helping this community. It supports the community in various ways and also provides office space to the Burmese Community Center for Education (BCCE), a nonprofit organization started by young Burmese graduates of Indiana University.
who have sacrificed their personal career aspirations to voluntarily and tirelessly work for the betterment of their community. Holding the philosophy that “education is the key not only to success, but also to freedom,” they offer several weekly programs to educate community members on life skills, local laws, and social norms. Their educational programs include mentoring, cultural education and appreciation, and various academic fields, all to enhance students’ ability to read, comprehend, and speak English well while teaching them how to live in American society. Outside of classes, they also operate a community organic farm and provide support with individual issues as they arise.

On a cool fall morning in 2010, I arrived at the local Tzu Chi office and met a group of about twenty high school students and ten volunteers. The students were extremely shy and would barely say anything at all. They practiced simple addition and multiplication on worksheets the volunteers prepared; only a few students were already capable of subtraction and division. Admittedly, I was a bit shocked at first, but after learning that there was no formal education in the refugee camps, it made sense.

For weeks we worked on accuracy and speed of basic math operations. We provided each student with multiplication tables, and at the start of each class they drilled each other—at first in their own language, then later in English. We saw our students improve each week as the math worksheets got progressively more advanced. Although we could not communicate well, math was our common language.

But there were numerous obstacles to overcome. If a math question was not set up in a familiar way, the students were stuck. Word problems were hopeless. And when two eighth graders asked if we could help them with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare, we knew we had a much larger responsibility in our hands. How could they be expected to talk about the author’s themes? Even sounding out the words to read a sentence was daunting. By the time they sounded out the third word, they had already forgotten the first. And yet, as frustrated as they may have been, they never gave up. So neither could we.

We were math tutors, but we needed to learn to be English teachers as well. So we searched for resources and developed lesson plans. We assessed students with standardized tests and divided them into three groups. Beginners learned to pronounce the sounds of the alphabet. Intermediates learned sight words and simple sentence structure. “Advanced” was only a bit more advanced. Defining words was very difficult. Not only did the students need to translate each word, many were words they had never even known in their own language, so images became very helpful. A window, for instance, is a familiar image to us, but tents in the refugee camps never had windows, so it was totally new for the students. We had to start from scratch.

The volunteer tutoring team naturally evolved with the changing program. Many of our original math tutors spoke English only as a second language. As the focus turned toward
English tutoring, they quietly withdrew, but as they did, they recruited high school students to take their places. For the refugee students, this was a blessing. Their tutors were now nearly the same age; seeing what these young tutors could achieve gave them hope, and they began to aspire to graduate high school, go on to college, and improve their lives and those around them. Both students and tutors also started to understand what giving really meant. Week in, week out, tutors gave of their time without any expectation of return, and they learned the indescribable joy felt in helping others.

We started emphasizing weekly journal writing, so that students could practice articulating their thoughts and writing them the best they could. This one exercise showed more potential than any other. Having students memorize new vocabulary words was too difficult because they rarely had chances to use the new words in daily life. Reading short stories was too difficult because they did not have a strong enough vocabulary. But in journal writing, each student wrote to his or her own level. Some started with simple sentences: “The chair is small.” Others began to express slightly more complex thoughts: “Because the chair is too small, he sat on the floor.”

As they articulated their thoughts, they searched for the right words and often went in circles to describe something that only needed a single word. It was the perfect time to introduce new vocabulary, because they learned words best when they struggled most to find them. Tutors helped correct grammar, and more advanced students began to work on flow of thought and writing with a purpose.

They also worked on reading comprehension skills when they read the week’s topic, or listening skills when the week’s entry was based on a video clip. While learning, students also recorded their own history. I often remind them to treasure these writings, so that one day they can share with their children and grandchildren the innermost thoughts they experienced as they learned a new life in a new land.

Later on, we started asking the students to present their journal writings in front of the classroom. As they shared their writing, they practiced speaking skills, sounding out each word, making eye contact, and moving the audience. They started out shy, speaking very softly, but they grew a little more confident each week. Their journal entries have touched us deeply as we learn of their hardships, their dreams, and their struggles.

The tutoring program has been running steadily for more than three years now. Tzu Chi and BCCE both push the students very hard, always encouraging them to study and catch up with their peers. Without formal education and language skills, the high school students especially struggle, but they work so hard, attending weeknight classes at the BCCE and at Tzu Chi on Saturday mornings. In fact, Tzu Chi volunteers Victoria Chiu and SinYin Er even host an SAT preparation class for juniors and seniors every Friday evening, to help those who dream of receiving their high school diploma and going to college.
Though volunteers tirelessly donate their time for these programs, we are only reaching maybe one-tenth of the refugee student population. We still need to work hard to engage the rest and inspire them to embrace the path of education. We are bearing witness to teen dropouts, teen pregnancy, runaways, alcohol abuse, drunk driving, and even seeds of gang activity. These are not uncommon problems in underprivileged neighborhoods, but with so many opportunities in this country, we hope to do all we can to plant seeds of goodness and help people make the right choices.

Already, some seeds are starting to sprout. When we have more students than tutors, we see students who have already studied a subject take the initiative to help others just learning it. Many volunteer in BCCE classes to help teach the younger students, and they help tend the community farm and volunteer at garage sale fundraisers.

One Saturday morning, volunteer Dong-Chang Shiue reported on a recent tornado relief effort in Henryville, Indiana. Through his slide show, the students learned about the great power of mother nature and how a precious life can be gone in an instant, but also how Tzu Chi relief can give hope and inspiration to survivors. Ree Reh, a young Burmese student said, “Next time you go, take me too.”

In fact, many students have already started helping in Tzu Chi activities. Students with good English like Shaw Mo and Ree Reh drop whatever they are doing to provide translation when we need it. Many students help us move donated furniture to recipients’ homes, and we have even taken a dozen students to volunteer for a day at Gleaners Food Bank. The seeds of goodness are surely sprouting in the Burmese community.

The Burmese Tutoring Program has been a bright light for these students, who are improving in their studies and finding hope for a bright future. Their families are encouraged to see them adjusting to their new environment as their kindness and love blossom. And for the tutors, they have seen how blessed they are, and they have learned that behind the sparkle in a person’s eyes are amazing stories that can touch our hearts. These tutors and students are all my teachers and I have infinite respect and gratitude for each of them.

When I first signed up in 2010, this was a commitment I never knew I could keep so long. But the journey so far has been life-changing. I have started to truly enjoy helping others, and I realized that I have been helped most of all, though I am still far from where I would like to be.

We learn by doing, and grow by giving of ourselves.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*
Easing a Difficult Transition

Angel Katona

For newly-arrived immigrant students in North Carolina, the budding partnership between Tzu Chi and the Newcomers School is truly a blessing.

Doris Henderson Newcomers School (DHNS) is a magnet school for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Guilford County, North Carolina. The school, which opened its doors in August 2007, is specifically designed for third- through twelfth-grade students who have never before attended school in the United States. Its mission is to prepare newly arrived immigrants, including many refugees, for successful transition into American schools, American society, and beyond. Students attend DHNS for only one academic year and are then transitioned to their neighborhood schools. The school typically serves an average of three hundred newly arrived students each year out of the two thousand refugees who join our community annually.

During the past six years, the majority of refugees have been Bhutanese ethnic minorities from Nepalese refugee camps; Burmese ethnic minorities from Malaysian and Thai refugee camps; Montagnards from the central highlands of Vietnam; Iraqi refugees from Syria, Turkey, and Jordan refugee camps; and refugees from several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Guilford County is also home to thousands of immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, Pakistan, Haiti, China, India, Africa, and Vietnam, to name a few.

It is said that Guilford may be the most diverse county in the southeastern United States. Thanks to an abundance of textile jobs and available support from many religious congregations, this was once a prime destination for people seeking to reach financial self-sufficiency through gainful employment opportunities despite limited English language and job skills. However, these types of jobs are scarce today as the majority of these
companies have left to set up shop overseas. The economic crisis has resulted in a shortage of job opportunities and a stronger need for community members and support agencies to collaborate to provide access to resources necessary for human survival.

By providing an education focused on the “whole child,” Doris Henderson Newcomers School provides a nurturing environment that allows students to gradually acclimate to their new lives in America in a smaller and gentler—yet still academically challenging—environment. Thanks to our smaller school population and specialized staff, we are able to assess and address the needs of the students and families and thus help to alleviate many of the natural barriers that interfere with their educational goals and progress.

Some of the most consistently occurring obstacles that refugee students and families face within the schools include, but are not limited to, accessing physical and mental healthcare; community safety issues such as bullying and neighborhood crimes; post-traumatic stress, grief, depression, and loneliness; understanding American laws, customs, societal expectations, and responsibilities; problems with family roles and relationships; difficulties in fulfilling basic needs of clothing and housing; understanding the American educational system and learning how to advocate for children within the schools; and so on.

Immigrants face the same barriers as refugees and also experience greater need for food, housing, and medical care due to an inability to qualify for many government assistance programs. In addition, immigrants typically do not enjoy the same support systems as refugees as they lack access to the comfort, guidance, and case management services provided by refugee resettlement programs.

As the school’s full-time social worker since August 2007, I have been able to establish partnerships with many community entities to ensure that student and family support extends from the school directly to the homes and communities where the students live. Through these partnerships we now have a strong, supportive, and culturally sensitive resource base for assisting our DHNS families. Such partnerships provide students and families with therapeutic services; an in-school clothing, school supply, and food pantry; two church-sponsored weekend food backpack programs; a community school garden; an annual dental clinic; and a weeklong summer camp. Now, our newest partnership is with Tzu Chi Foundation.

During the late spring of 2013, I was contacted by our local Tzu Chi representative, Amy Ma. Shortly after our conversation, Tzu Chi volunteers came to visit our school—not only from Guilford County and Raleigh, but even all the way from Washington, DC. Together we planned to begin our new school year in August 2013 with a warm, loving greeting from Tzu Chi. On the first day of school, each student was individually greeted by Tzu Chi volunteers with a deep bow, a new backpack filled with school supplies, and a hug!
Within just a few minutes, all the students and staff members present, along with the regional superintendent, could clearly feel a radiant aura of peace, respect, and love for all. The feeling was so strong that many adults in the room wiped tears from their eyes. It was at this very moment I realized just how important and valuable our new friendship with the Tzu Chi Foundation had become. There could not have been a better possible way to start the school year.

Two months later, on October 26, we held our first Saturday School program of the year. Tzu Chi volunteers arrived early in the morning to set up and serve a vegetarian lunch to our students, their parents and siblings, and our teachers, and volunteer JC Lin talked to us about the many environmental and health benefits of choosing a vegetarian diet, as well as the importance of reducing waste and recycling. We enjoyed the lunch tremendously as well as the opportunity for fellowship with Tzu Chi volunteers.

It amazes me every time I see Tzu Chi volunteers in action. They are so very efficient, clean, and organized as well as friendly, warm, and loving! Tzu Chi has created a culture of love, respect, honor, and dignity in our school, beginning in August when they made the first day of school in America so memorable for all of our students. We are all so thankful and appreciative to have this partnership with Tzu Chi Foundation and we hope to keep this partnership alive for many years to come! 🌿
Auntie Barbara’s Bamboo Bank

Sally Wei

By dedicating her tips to the needy, Barbara helps spread a message of love.

Three years ago, a new neighbor moved into the building behind our Tzu Chi office in Santa Rosa, California: a dog grooming and sitting business. We were expecting dogs howling all the time, but instead it is perfectly peaceful.

To show our hospitality, we Tzu Chi volunteers went to say hello within the first week. Barbara, the very friendly owner, was delighted to chat with us, so our visits have become more frequent. Although Barbara and the volunteers often have to shout in order to hear each other over the sound of dogs barking, this has never discouraged the building of our friendship, and we have long hoped that Barbara one day will have a chance to attend one of our events.

On September 29, 2013, we invited Barbara again to come to our Veggie Iron Chef Fair. Barbara was not in her shop at the time, so we left an invitation and a copy of the USA Journal with a member of her staff.

That night, I received a phone message left by Barbara: "Hi, this is your neighbor Barbara. I saw the story about the Bamboo Bank; may I have one? I would like to donate the tips I receive from my customers to you guys, so you can help more people." Wow! What great news! I was so charged by her message, I couldn’t wait for the next day to give her the Bamboo Bank.

I had never imagined that a simple invitation would spark our neighbor’s generosity. What a great idea, to turn her small tips into Great Love! It confirms my belief in Master Cheng Yen’s teaching: “When we guard our hearts and conduct ourselves properly, with love and patience we can engage society and inspire more people to become living bodhisattvas!”

Thank you, Barbara, for your great inspiration! 🌻

Contribute according to one’s ability; tiny droplets of love have the collective power to achieve great things.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
The World through a Camera

Gina Hsu

A young volunteer reflects on her experience in the Dominican Republic.

“...I was overwhelmed by patients’ sorrow and pain."

After leaving the airport we headed along the Dominican Republic’s beautiful Caribbean coast. The sky was so blue and the water was so green, it was beyond my imagination that this beautiful island Columbus discovered had become a mixture of old buildings and filth, with a very high poverty rate among the residents. Older volunteers told me that the footprint of love from Tzu Chi volunteers in the Dominican Republic started in 1998: beginning with charity, then medical clinics and education.

During this visit we would be holding free clinics, so we needed to prepare lots of things. At Tzu Chi Dominican Republic Service Center, everyone had to help pack drugs and other materials. I was amazed to see even doctors and nurses busy lifting heavy bags. No wonder my mom always says, “At Tzu Chi, women work like men, and men work like supermen.” From my point of view, I think everybody acted like Superman, even children behaved like adults, and I realized how grateful and dedicated they were when I looked at their happy faces.

I was stunned when we arrived at the La Romana community and saw how badly they needed our help; I wondered how Tzu Chi volunteers felt fifteen years ago. All of a sudden, I wanted to cry. Looking out the window, friendly children with innocent eyes waved at us; to them we were the Blue Angels of hope. The clinic was always, always crowded; it seemed we had an endless line of patients.

My job this time was documentation; since I served as the president of the photography club in high school, I thought I was quite qualified. But when I was helping at the clinic, I often forgot to capture photos because I was overwhelmed by patients’ sorrow and pain. I would like to express my gratitude to volunteer Tina Lee for her kindness and patience with me. Because of her, I not only picked up some techniques, but also learned to capture pictures through Tzu Chi’s humanistic vision.

I had a chance to do home visits with reporters from Da Ai Television. When we walked on the old, messy mud road, seeing many concrete block houses roofed with rusty corrugated tin sheets, I couldn’t imagine how anyone could live in this kind of place. Children surrounded us asking...
Delivering Love to the Caribbean

Tzu Chi doctors serve with compassion and love. Photo: Gina Hsu

for their pictures to be taken, and I tried to communicate with them using what little Spanish I learned in school. When I pressed the shutter button, they showed their most beautiful smiles and posture. At that moment, they were the most beautiful angels in my life.

Mr. Rafael lived in a filthy house with nothing but four walls. Although there was a fridge, there was no food, just a few bottles of liquid medicine. Local volunteers reminded his eight children that Tzu Chi volunteers had come all the way from the United States to help them; they should learn how to take care of themselves and also look after their ill father. The children immediately picked up rags and broom and started cleaning the house. Local Tzu Chi volunteers thanked us for our care for the natives; they hope that through interaction with the residents the whole community can learn to help themselves and one another. This is their only chance to escape poverty.

On the day of the graduation ceremony, all of the graduates dressed up and were accompanied by their whole families. It reminded me of my middle school graduation, but I don’t think I was this happy. For me, it was just one of many special days, but for them this was huge, as this could be the only graduation ceremony they ever have. Thinking of this made me feel honored to take their graduation photos. I carefully adjusted their posture and groomed their hair, hoping that when I pressed the shutter button, their cherished memories would be preserved with warmth and love—especially for those grandparents in their sixties or seventies who had been waiting their entire life to go to school. One of the grandmothers stated that she had been waiting for sixty or seventy years to learn how to read. Tzu Chi volunteers helped her dream come true. Even though many people revealed their toothless smiles in their graduation pictures, they still looked so beautiful and charming. I finally realized the joy of helping others.

Now I really understand why Master Cheng Yen says, “Know your blessings, cherish them, and sow more blessings.” I am so lucky to grow up in a prosperous country with a happy and loving family, and to be healthy and able to attend school. I wish that from now on I can help alleviate the suffering of those in need.

Only when we witness suffering firsthand will we appreciate our blessings.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Locals wait patiently for their turn at the Tzu Chi clinic. Photo: Gina Hsu
The first time I went to Haiti was in March 2010, just weeks after the devastating earthquake that destroyed the capital Port-au-Prince, killed over two hundred thousand people, and left over one million homeless. That trip changed my life. Seeing suffering on a scale and level I couldn’t have imagined in my worst nightmares, and being able to help provide for the survivors—this opened my heart to the true meaning of compassion. It made me decide to dedicate my time and efforts to Tzu Chi’s missions.

Returning to Haiti in October 2013, much has changed. The rubble is gone from the streets, and many have been able to move back into their restored or rebuilt homes. However, there are still nearly a quarter million people living in temporary tent camps without proper sanitation or security, unemployment numbers are sky high, and hundreds of thousands of people are unable to eat their fill every day.

If we could inspire neighbors to help neighbors and communities to support one another, that could be the start of a real change in Haiti.

The main reason we went to Haiti this time was to distribute 160 metric tons of rice from Tzu Chi. Eight thousand bags of rice, each weighing forty-four pounds, might sound like a lot, but in a country where 1.5 million people are affected by food insecurity, eight thousand bags of rice is like a drop of water in the desert. Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, is well aware of this. Before I left the Jing Si Abode in Hualien for the long journey to the United States and Haiti, she gave me one short instruction: “Go and sow the seeds of love in Haiti!” She knew that this rice alone would not make a long-term impact; but if we could sow seeds of love in local communities, if we could inspire neighbors to help neighbors and communities to support one another, then we might effect a circle of goodness that could be the start of a real change in Haiti.
During two short weeks in October and November, we held many distributions in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien, trying to reach the families in most desperate need. At each distribution, we held a ceremony of giving, where we explained to the recipients how the rice distribution was possible only thanks to the love from innumerable individual donors around the world, and how all this love had come together through a single compassionate thought from a young, penniless nun in a small town halfway around the world. The message was well-received, and the valuable rice was never taken for granted. When a recipient dropped her bag and rice started spilling onto the ground, two local volunteers immediately bent down to collect the rice back into the bag so that this rice, which was so hard to come by, would not be wasted and lost.

At every distribution, James Chen, our group leader for this mission, told the recipients, “We ask for nothing in return from you. All we ask is that if your neighbor is hungry, please give him a bowl of rice; if your neighbor is cold, please share a blanket with him.” The recipients enthusiastically applauded these words of love.

We also donated rice to several orphanages, including a school and orphanage for over three hundred deaf and mute children run by the Catholic congregation Daughters of Wisdom. When we visited the orphanage, the children were very happy to see such unusual visitors bringing an abundance of love. The little girls and boys immediately grabbed our hands to show us their dormitory and tell us their stories using sign language: “I came to the orphanage when I was five years old. Now I am thirteen. I am so grateful to the Sisters for taking such good care of us!” We felt incredibly blessed for being able to help these adorable children; the rice we gave them should last almost a year.

Apart from distributing rice, another objective of the trip was to inspire more local volunteers through volunteer training sessions. In these sessions, which were held completely in French for the locals' benefit, we chose not to focus on the actual practice of Tzu Chi's work, but instead on the underlying philosophy—the spirit of a bodhisattva, which can be summarized in three words: gratitude, respect, and love. To help the participants truly understand these concepts, we led them in several exercises. One was a skit that highlighted the fact that when we give to others, we ourselves receive joy, and that the concepts of giver and receiver are in this way inverted. “So that is why Tzu Chi volunteers say ‘thank you’ when they give!” Seeing the expression of delight on the faces of the participants as they realized this concept was wonderful.

Another exercise was “Circle of Respect,” in which participants formed facing pairs of concentric circles. Each individual said the words...
“I respect you deeply” to the person facing him or her. Then, everyone rotated one spot to tell the same thing to the next person in the circle. This simple exercise had a powerful impact on the participants, many of whom had never had another person direct such words of respect to them ever before in their life. After the exercise, some shared that every time they said “I respect you,” they could feel their own self-respect and strength grow. Others said that they now felt like everyone in the group was their own family.

During one of the trainings, a participant suddenly stood up and asked a question. He was trying to address me in English, but he mixed English, French, and Creole to the point where he had to repeat his question four times before anyone understood what he was asking. His question was: “Who among those present wants to become a true bodhisattva, a person who gives without asking for anything in return?” A large majority of those present quickly and enthusiastically raised their hands: “I want to be a true bodhisattva!”

If the more than two hundred volunteers present at the trainings start spreading this spirit of gratitude, love, and respect in their own communities and inspire more people to come together to help those in suffering, then they can make a difference far beyond any amount of rice given by an external aid organization. With the start of such a virtuous circle, the Haitian community can lift itself out of its poverty and suffering. As I left Haiti this time, I could feel that hope for a bright future has been kindled in this suffering country.

For more on Tzu Chi’s long-term projects in Haiti, please see Issue 37 (Fall 2013).
Gallstones are very common in the West. In the United States alone, approximately twenty million people suffer from gallstones. Though the great majority present no symptoms, more than one half million gallbladders are removed in the United States each year, at a cost of over five billion dollars. With proper diet and an awareness of risk factors, these costs can often be avoided. When gallstones occur anyway, there are a number of possible treatment options.

What are Gallstones?

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped sac below the liver on the right side of the abdomen. It is part of the digestive system, connecting the liver to the common bile duct and then to the small bowel. Its main function is to hold bile excreted by the liver. After a meal, the body produces a hormone which stimulates the gallbladder to contract and squeeze bile to the small bowel. The bile it excretes is important for fat degradation and absorption. It is also essential in absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Gallstones develop in the gallbladder for several reasons. In general, women are at greater risk, with gallstones occurring at a female:male ratio of 3.5:2. Estrogen, hormonal changes during pregnancy, and hormone replacement therapy will all affect the cholesterol/bile ratio and indirectly lead to gallstones. According to research, 25% of American females will contract gallstones. The percentage rises to 50% for women over seventy-five years old, compared with 30% for men over seventy.

The great majority of gallstones are cholesterol stones, which may be caused by an imbalance of cholesterol and bile acid in the gallbladder, similar to how too much sugar in tea can cause precipitation. A second, less...
common type is dark brown in color and formed by bilirubinate salt. These are commonly seen in patients with cirrhosis of the liver. The third and rarest kind of gallstones are black and most commonly found in patients with hemolitic anemia, such as sickle-cell anemia. The size of gallstones varies; they can be as small as a grain of rice or as large as a golf ball.

Risk Factors & Prevention

Hereditary and genetic factors play a role in the occurrence of gallstones, making them more common in certain ethnic groups. For example, 80% of the Pima Indian women of Arizona suffer from gallstones. The condition is more common among people of European and Native American heritage, less so among those with Asian or African heritage.

Diet may also play a role in the formation of gallstones. In a recent research study of seventy-seven thousand patients over eleven years, patients who ate diets high in fruit, vegetable, and fiber content had fewer gallstones than those who consumed other diets.

Those wishing to reduce the chance of gallstone formation should consider a vegetarian diet high in Vitamin C and avoid excess consumption of alcohol. Beneficial food items include beets, green soup (made of parsley, zucchini, green bean, and celery), flaxseed tea, grape, apple, ginger root, garlic, avocado, coconut, fresh vegetable juice, and plenty of water.

If a patient already has gallstones, avoiding foods high in fat and cholesterol should reduce the chance of triggering an acute attack. Foods to be avoided include all dairy products, red meat, eggs, refined grains and sugars, coffee, and allergens.

Symptoms & Diagnosis

Clinically, 90% of patients with gallstones present no symptoms. The most common symptoms that do arise are pain in the right upper quadrant of the abdomen—especially after fatty meals—as well as nausea, vomiting, abdominal distension, and excessive sweating. The pain may also radiate to the right shoulder or upper back, and symptoms can last from a few minutes to several hours.

If pain does not subside within a few hours, especially when accompanied by fever, the patient may have already progressed to more serious acute cholecystitis and will require immediate medical attention, including hospitalization. Delays in managing an acute condition may lead to more serious, even fatal, complications.

Proper diagnosis relies on patient history and physical examination, including ultrasound, blood count, and liver function tests. CT and radionuclide scans (such as HIDA) may also be used.

Treatment

If symptomatic gallstones are left untreated, potential complications include acute cholecystitis, common bile duct stones, cholangitis, pancreatitis, and even gallbladder cancer. Eighty percent of gallbladder cancer cases include gallstones.

How are gallstones managed? Opinions vary. In general, there are three approaches to
treating gallstones and cholecystitis, depending on the specific circumstances.

1. Acute cholecystitis—inflammation of the gallbladder without gallstones—may be due to cystic duct obstruction, gallbladder hypoxia, or infection. These conditions commonly occur after major surgery or long-term fasting, or in patients who suffer from trauma, sepsis, diabetes, or AIDS. This condition is typically very severe and requires immediate hospitalization. If a life-threatening gallbladder abscess develops, the physician should consider a CT- or ultrasound-guided cholecystostomy drainage procedure. Once the patient is stabilized, planned removal of gallbladder is justified.

2. Patients with gallstones may be divided into two types: asymptomatic and symptomatic

   A) Asymptomatic patients (silent stones) aged sixty-five or older may consider watching and waiting, since only 1 to 4% of cases become symptomatic annually. For younger patients, elective surgical removal could be considered.

   B) For symptomatic patients, the great majority (95%) will be handled with surgical removal of the gallbladder (cholecystectomy), through either traditional or laparoscopic surgery. The latter, more recent, method is less invasive, safe, and causes less pain, yet still maintains a success rate of 95 to 98% in experienced hands. During surgery, an x-ray of the bile duct (cholangiogram) is routinely taken to ensure that no stones remain in the common bile duct.

3. Patients who cannot undergo surgery, or whose health conditions prevent them from undergoing general anesthesia, may consider medicine to dissolve smaller cholesterol stones. However, the nonsurgical success rate is only 40%, and results may only be seen after six to eight months. Furthermore, the rate of recurrence after therapy ceases is high. Typically, nonsurgical treatment is reserved specifically for patients who absolutely cannot undergo surgery. Other medical therapies have been tested, but results are inconclusive so far.

   In general, proper treatment of gallstones has minimal complications. In most patients, the common bile duct can take over the function of the gallbladder, i.e., storing the bile. Approximately 20 to 30% of patients may develop sporadic diarrhea as a result of bile entering the small bowel too rapidly. This can easily be treated with medicine. About 10 to 30% of patients experience postcholecystectomy syndrome, which may include such symptoms as upset stomach, nausea, vomiting, gas, bloating, or pain in the abdomen. These problems could in fact be due to unhealthy bile in the liver and unrelated to the gallbladder. Patients suffering from these symptoms may consider changes to their diet or bile flush therapy.

   Always remember that healthy diet and living habits, proper selection of therapy methods, and careful selection of a good, conscientious surgeon are the best ways to protect your health.

**Disclaimer:** The information above is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician, physical therapist, or other qualified health provider prior to starting any new treatment.

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Life’s most valuable gift is a healthy body; more valuable yet is following the right direction.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*
A New Garden for Seeds of Compassion

Sandy Yin | Translated by Jeannine Fung

At the newest Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool, children have an opportunity to cultivate knowledge, wisdom, and character.

On October 25, 2013, the brand new Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool in Walnut, California, held its very first open house. As a group of dedicated volunteers busily prepared tea and snacks, they were joined by parents visiting the campus to register their children. Together, they all joyously celebrated the opening of the fourth Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool to be established in the United States.

Sowing the Seeds of Love

In January 2013, the new preschool was still in the preparatory stage, but Kayla’s mother wasted no time in registering her daughter. She already knew Tzu Chi and believed in its educational goal—a combination of character building, intellectual formation, and humanistic teachings—so the news that Tzu Chi was bringing a preschool to Walnut was like sweet music to her ears. After eagerly waiting for nine months, Kayla’s parents at last were able to witness the opening of the preschool.

Aden’s grandparents registered their two grandchildren not long after Kayla’s parents had registered her. Even months before the school was ready to open, they frequently visited the campus to keep up with its progress, anxiously awaiting its opening. Aden, an energetic little boy, was reluctant to leave whenever they visited. For his grandparents, the positive character building in Tzu Chi schools was paramount. Filial piety, respect for teachers, and acting courteously toward others were all behaviors that they hoped Aden would learn and absorb.

When Terran’s mother first heard the news that Tzu Chi would open a preschool in Walnut, she immediately went to the Tzu Chi preschool in Monrovia to register her son. As soon as the new school opened, she transferred Terran from another preschool without a moment’s hesitation. She explained, “I know that Tzu Chi’s bilingual programs encompass the teachings of gratitude, respect, and love, and it has always been my hope that Terran could be a student.” She was anxious that the timing was not favorable because Terran is already scheduled to start kindergarten in September 2014, so he will have just a short time in Tzu Chi. But now that the opening day was finally arriving, she knew that the long wait was worthwhile.

On the wonderful day of the open house, amidst all the inquiries and expectations of parents, Walnut’s Tzu Chi Great Love
Preschool officially opened its doors. The school’s director, Ms. Carmen De La Fuente, has more than twenty years of experience in teaching and school administration. She leads a group of professional teachers who will nurture their students with love, understanding, and compassion by employing age-appropriate and personalized teaching materials. They will lead their students to explore and cultivate their innate goodness and potential, and thereby establish a school of love and hope where seeds of compassion and giving are encouraged to grow.

**Nurturing Pillars of Hope**

Ten days after the open house, parents walked their children to school as classes officially started on November 4, 2013. Even though the unfamiliar surroundings led to some tears, the children soon calmed down thanks to the loving care of their teachers. Within a few minutes, they began to follow their classmates to form circles around their teachers, who were proud of their ability to adapt.

Lukus, not yet three years old, was one of those crying. He did not want to leave his mother, who worried that his separation anxiety would last throughout the day. Instead, she was amazed to see him merrily join his new classmates in games and activities.

Three-year-old Tabatha’s mother shared, “I truly like the loving atmosphere of Tzu Chi. Its positive energy motivates children to be grateful and to care for the environment and all animals. I think any child who enters this school is fortunate to be here. Each day when I bring Tabatha to school, I feel as if we are coming home. I can fully entrust my child in the teachers’ care and go to work with peace of mind. I don’t have to worry about what she learns and what she eats.”

For those few who were shy and withdrawn, it took the director and the teachers just three days to integrate the children in all activities because of their patience and understanding. The children not only began to take the initiative to greet their teachers, they also asked for more freedom to play together.

The educational field is like a garden. Teachers are gardeners and students are young saplings. Children need to be watered with love from their teachers and families in order to grow into giant trees. Education is not a speedy process, but rather a long-term commitment to steadily nurture children with Great Love.

Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool has now begun its long journey of nurturing future pillars of hope in Walnut, California. Through bilingual education, the aphorisms of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and various humanistic teaching methods, the good seeds in each child’s heart will be nurtured so that they may flourish, grow, and produce excellent fruits of love and hope for society. 🌱
In Gualeguay, Argentina, Tzu Chi volunteers partnered with the local Red Cross to hold a free clinic on August 31, 2013. Volunteers entertained and introduced environmental protection as patients waited to be seen by doctors. Photo: Jingrong Lin

A charity garage sale was held at the Tzu Chi office in Las Vegas, Nevada, on October 12, 2013. Volunteers invited their neighbors to donate items they no longer use and thereby develop their kindness and lengthen the life of those products. Photo: Audrey Cheng

On August 31, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers showcased Jing Si products at Clear Lake City-County Freeman Branch Library in Houston, Texas. Here, a volunteer introduces Tzu Chi’s eco-friendly blankets made from recycled plastic bottles. Photo: Zhewei Liang

On September 29, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers in New York held a recycling event to help support environmental protection. Here, volunteers sort plastic bottles and aluminum cans. Photo: Peter Chiu
In September 2013, nearly twenty inches of rain dumped on Boulder County, Colorado: the annual average in just three days. Seventeen counties were affected and over fifty bridges collapsed. As soon as the roads cleared, Tzu Chi volunteers visited disaster areas twice to assess the situation. Relief distributions were held in Greeley on October 18 and Lyons on October 20, benefiting 150 households with nearly $76,000 in cash cards. Photo provided by Tzu Chi Charity Development Department

Tzu Chi volunteers held a free clinic in Itaquaquecetuba, São Paulo, Brazil, on September 15, 2013, bringing health care to residents of this remote area. Photo: Ruwen Xiao

Greater Washington DC Region Tzu Chi volunteers continue their tutoring service at Broad Acres Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, in the hopes that the Happy Campus Program will not only help students improve in their academic studies but also instill in them a correct view on life. Here, young volunteers tutor students on October 5, 2013. Photo: Mouyou Tsai

Every week, parents share their childrearing experiences during the parent-child class offered as part of the community education program in New Jersey. Here, children play in a game involving traffic regulations on October 6, 2013. Photo: Wankang Wang
On September 14, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers held a CPR and First Aid Class in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. Certified by American Red Cross, teacher Suhong Hong demonstrated CPR and other first-aid skills helpful in an emergency. Photo: Wankang Wang

▲ Tzu Chi volunteers in Dayton, Ohio, organized a medical seminar at their office on October 5, 2013. Volunteers not only provided a lecture and free immunizations, but also introduced Tzu Chi’s philosophy and promoted vegetarianism to the public. Photo: Guocheng Lin

▲ On September 14, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers in Seattle, Washington, paid a visit to a refugee family from Iraq to present them with love and care, as well as some much-needed furniture. Photo: Xinhua Wen

The popular restaurant chain Panda Express has long supported Tzu Chi. On September 18, 2013, Southern California Panda Express managers and employees visited Tzu Chi USA Headquarters in San Dimas to learn about Tzu Chi through a series of classes. Here, the Panda team learns flower arrangement. Photo: Shengping Liu
20 Years of Compassionate Care

Understanding the clear link between illness and poverty, Dharma Master Cheng Yen vowed to deliver compassionate care to those in greatest need. In 1972, Tzu Chi initiated a regular free clinic to serve those unable to afford care. In 1986, Tzu Chi General Hospital was opened—the first of six now in operation.

Following this compassionate example, United States volunteers opened Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in 1993. Two decades later, through community clinics, medical outreaches, health seminars, support groups, and much more, Tzu Chi medical volunteers are making a greater impact than ever before.
Following in the Master’s Footsteps

Debra Boudreaux | Translated by An Ning

Tzu Chi Medical Foundation CEO reflects on two decades of delivering compassionate care to those in need.

On November 1, 1993, Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic opened its doors to the public in Alhambra, California. The first patient we served back then was a young woman who needed a physical exam before enrolling at Pasadena City College. In the blink of an eye, two whole decades have passed!

In the Free Clinic’s early days, volunteers would meet at the clinic every Tuesday evening after work, and we held new volunteer trainings every Saturday to gradually establish a network of medical volunteers. Over time, medical outreach sites were established in Fresno and Milpitas further to the north, with additional free clinics opening in Honolulu, Hawaii, and Flushing, New York. More recently, clinics have also been established in South El Monte and Wilmington to provide additional medical services to the Southern California community.

Treating Patients as Family

Dr. Chin-Lon Lin, the first director of Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic, constantly encouraged healthcare professionals and medical volunteers to reach out to the neglected, underserved corners of society. Through an early collaboration with Lucky Farms as a supportive partner and intermediary, Tzu Chi began medical outreach services to agricultural workers in San Bernardino County, California. Because farm workers in California tend to migrate north and south to follow the growing and harvesting seasons, the Southern California medical team started tracing their footsteps in 1994 in order to provide this underserved, uninsured population with critically needed medical services through mobile outreach events. Since 1998, volunteer medical teams in Northern and Central California have carried the responsibility of caring for farm workers from the Central Valley to the north.
In 2000, to provide greater accessibility to medical services for patients, the Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic began driving into agricultural and low-income communities throughout California, starting regular outreach services at fixed clinic sites. As of 2013, Tzu Chi’s Mobile Clinic fleet consists of five mobile clinics—four with dental services and one with vision services—that safeguard health and promote preventive medicine in the community.

In twenty years, approximately one thousand free clinic events have been organized and offered at community clinic locations and medical outreach sites. In total, they have served over one million patient encounters. In addition to daily outpatient services, we initially held free clinic outreach events once every three months; then we gradually transitioned to conduct outreach services each month. In partnership with healthcare alliances such as Remote Area Medical (RAM), Care Harbor, and the Flying Doctors, Tzu Chi also holds several annual large-scale medical outreach events that have benefitted tens of thousands of patients in Northern and Southern California.

Over the years, members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) in the United States have consistently promoted preventive medicine and health education in their communities. In New York, Tzu Chi and the Red Cross jointly sponsor blood drives four times a year. Across the US, volunteers have created various support groups—including cancer, dialysis, and diabetes support groups—to support patients and their families through the difficult times in their lives. TIMA also provides medical services in conjunction with Tzu Chi’s international disaster relief efforts and has provided such services in nearly fifteen countries to date. The smile on a patient’s face is the greatest force to inspire compassion and kindness in both care providers and patients.

**Reflecting Asian-American Demographics**

The accomplishments of the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation over the last twenty years are fruits of the wholehearted and persistent devotion of countless volunteers and members of the twenty-one TIMA chapters across the nation. Furthermore, partnerships with many charitable organizations, healthcare groups, and academic institutions have made it possible for Tzu Chi to enter into mainstream American society, while at the same time introducing members of those groups to Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s dharma teachings and Tzu Chi’s humanistic culture.
OneLegacy

CEO Tom Mone has said, "Master Cheng Yen taught me to make good use of the community’s volunteer resources network. Five years ago, the annual Donate Life Run/Walk had only about one thousand participants. Today, the Run/Walk records one hundred thousand participants!"

In conjunction with public health departments, University of Southern California, and University of California, San Francisco, Tzu Chi has been promoting Smoking Cessation programs for the past several years. Even though other healthcare organizations provide similar services, Tzu Chi’s unique method helps smokers quit through a pioneering approach that augments traditional Western medicine methods with Chinese acupuncture.

Another contribution that Tzu Chi Medical Foundation provides to American society is collecting data about the service needs of Asian-American populations. Kaiser Permanente and Methodist Hospital conduct assessments of community needs every three years. However, the data they are able to collect does not fully reflect the true immediate needs of Asian populations. Tzu Chi’s five-year reports contain service data that clearly reflects the culture, habits, and health needs of Asian Americans, so this data serves as a critically useful index for Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and relevant agencies in setting annual targets for community health services.

Marching into its fifteenth year, the Women’s Health Special Project has also been quite successful, especially its diabetes management and weight loss components. Due to cultural and linguistic discrepancies, public health agencies rarely possess conclusive data relevant to Asian women’s health. Data and knowledge that Tzu Chi possesses in this regard are critically important to public health departments in Southern California. Tzu Chi’s Breast Cancer Early Detection Program (BCEDP) directly links to the Department of Public Health’s online network, allowing for the Department to assess a clear understanding of breast cancer risk levels of Asian women in the San Gabriel Valley. This understanding is subsequently very useful in implementing healthcare strategies.

Creating an Electronic Health Record System

The trend of transitioning to an electronic health record (EHR) system is among the challenges the Medical Foundation faces. My spouse—my bodhisattva of support—Ronald Boudreaux has been supporting me silently behind the scenes for these past twenty years. Two years ago, he stepped out to the front line to offer his information technology expertise. As charitable organizations have been facing the challenge of declining donations throughout the economic downturn, he has humbly given his energy to contribute to the Medical Foundation’s cost management efforts. He said, "My middle age is more fulfilling as a result of participating in Tzu Chi’s EHR project. I am always busy with IT preparations prior to community outreach free clinics, onsite assistance on outreach days, and periodic video conferences with TIMA chapters in New York, Long Island, Northern California, and Dallas, Texas, sharing information about the electronic medical records system. My body may be worn, but my mind is not, in cultivating greater wisdom for a more fulfilling life!"

Many Tzu Chi volunteers do not have insurance. This is also one of the reasons for the creation of an EHR system, as EHR uses numbers as identifiers, instead of names, and thereby
protects personal data. The Medical Foundation started EHR with outreach clinics because it is easier to train volunteers with outreach data and for doctors to adjust to the new electronic format of operations. Collaboration and working rapport established for EHR in care delivery through outreach clinics can then be transferred into the community clinic system. This can save a lot of time, effort, and money.

**Guarding Lives Together**

In its first decade, the Medical Foundation was dedicated to the work of spreading love by widely sowing seeds of goodness. During its second decade, the Foundation cultivated more deeply in these communities by fostering talents and inspiring love. Tzu Chi Medical Foundation volunteers adhere to the principles of the Four Immeasurables—benevolence, compassion, joy, and equanimity—as learned and cultivated through studying texts including The Twenty Challenges to Enlightenment, The Thirty-Seven Principles of Enlightenment, The Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance, and The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings. In the coming third decade, we will follow the compassionate advice of Master Cheng Yen to guard life and return to our dharma roots through unity, harmony, mutual love, and mutual assistance.

Therefore, we decided to commemorate the end of the second decade and beginning of the third with a celebration of the “Return of the Bamboo Banks.” We distributed one thousand Tzu Chi bamboo banks throughout all medical outreach events in 2013. When we visited the same locations for outreach events three months later, patients returned these banks filled with their spare change. In the past, we simply recorded such donations as anonymous, since we were unable to keep copious records, but now, with the implementation of EHR, we are able to track and compile these statistics. Beginning with the major Care 4 a Healthy IE medical outreach this past June, for every patient who adopts a Bamboo Bank, we lovingly give the first one-dollar deposit and provide a receipt, hoping to motivate these patients to continue to donate with love.

At first, the patients we cared for were primarily migrant agricultural workers; over the past two decades, we have reached out to the homeless and military veterans as well. Most recently, we have extended our services to rehabilitated individuals on parole or released from prisons. Tzu Chi medical professionals and volunteers regard all our patients and all those in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups as our own family. I wish all the best to all medical professionals and volunteers as they mindfully cultivate communities across the United States with the purity of children, the courage of lions, and the endurance of camels. Navigating the path of guarding life presents its impediments, but it is still possible to walk with compassion and wisdom. Tzu Chi volunteers, let us continue to follow in the Master’s footsteps.
Twenty Years of Compassionate Care

Over two decades of compassionately treating patients, Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation has achieved a great number of significant milestones, including:

11/1/93 – Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic (now Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Center) opened in Alhambra, California.

2/5/94 – Volunteer doctors traveled to Santa Clarita, California, to provide free health care, medicine, and several days of hot mobile showers to people affected by the Northridge Earthquake.

4/24/94 – Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic held its first community health fair, serving more than five hundred patients in Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley.

12/28/94 – Fourteen volunteers from Los Angeles and San Diego traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, to provide winter relief and free medical care to the local poor.

10/29/95 – Volunteers from San Jose joined doctors and nurses from Los Angeles to hold the first free clinic at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in Northern California's Mendocino County.

2/25/96 – A community health event was held for the first time in San Bernardino, California, with 358 individuals receiving Western, Traditional Chinese, and dental treatments.

8/8/98 – Thanks to the hard work of five doctors and ten volunteers from Hawaii, two days of medical clinics were held in American Samoa, helping more than seven hundred.

8/16/98 – Tzu Chi volunteers held a week of clinics in seventeen Peruvian villages struck especially hard by El Niño flooding, serving more than a thousand local residents.

12/5/98 – After Hurricane Georges devastated the Dominican Republic, Tzu Chi volunteers provided relief goods to a thousand affected families, and medical services to nearly as many.

4/2/00 – Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic established Tzu Chi Cancer Support Group.

4/30/00 – Tzu Chi held its first medical clinic and bone marrow donor drive in Las Vegas, Nevada.

1/15/01 – After a 7.6-magnitude earthquake in El Salvador killed eight hundred and injured four thousand, Tzu Chi volunteers traveled there to hold distributions and medical clinics.

2/23/02 – Fifteen volunteers traveled from New Jersey to Dominican Republic to provide medical care for more than six hundred young patients at La Romana Tzu Chi School.

3/2/03 – Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic held its first free clinic at Skid Row in Los Angeles.

6/1/03 – Tzu Chi volunteers delivered medical care to migrant farm workers in California's Central Valley, serving more than four hundred patients in Kerman.

8/16/03 – Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) volunteers in Chicago joined with Warrenville Youth & Family Services to provide Back to School medical care for local students.
11/22/03 – Volunteers from the Free Clinic provided care for communities near Lake Arrowhead affected by major October wildfires.

1/24/05 – US medical volunteers joined their counterparts from several other nations to deliver rice and medical care to Sri Lankan survivors of the major 2004 tsunami.

9/1/05 – Tzu Chi Community Clinic opened in South El Monte, California, to serve uninsured patients with Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine services, social services application assistance, and preventive education.

9/4/05 – Volunteers drove mobile medical clinics two thousand miles east to Houston, Texas, to serve Hurricane Katrina refugees staying in the Astrodome shelter.

2/6/06 – Joining together with Remote Area Medical and American Dental Association, Tzu Chi volunteers held seven days of medical relief for Hurricane Katrina survivors in New Orleans, Louisiana.

3/18/07 – In Tzu Chi Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, twenty-seven doctors began serving patients with individual consultations, health seminars, vaccinations, blood donation drives, and more.

10/21/07 – TIMA volunteers in Long Island, New York, worked together with St. Hugh Church for the first time to bring medical care to more than four hundred patients.

11/15/08 – TIMA volunteers in Boston, Massachusetts, worked together with five other health organizations for the first time as part of the annual Community Health Day in North Quincy.

1/12/09 – Tzu Chi began providing twice-weekly dental services to the annual East San Gabriel Valley Winter Shelter program in Southern California.

8/11/09 – Tzu Chi and Remote Area Medical (RAM) held an eight-day major medical clinic in Los Angeles for the first time.

10/22/10 – Tzu Chi volunteers collaborated with The Modern House Call for Women to provide three days of medical services for low-income and unemployed women in Long Beach, California.

11/7/10 – Tzu Chi Community Clinic, Wilmington, opened to offer Traditional Chinese Medicine, dental care, and preventive education to the South Los Angeles community.

3/24/11 – Tzu Chi Medical Foundation and Association of Organ Procurement
Organizations signed an agreement for Tzu Chi to promote organ donation in Asian-American communities.

**10/20/11** – Tzu Chi volunteers participated in the four-day CareNow major health clinic held in the Los Angeles Sports Arena, helping more than 4,000 uninsured patients and setting up follow-up care.

**1/2/12** – On the invitation of OneLegacy, an organ donation organization, Tzu Chi Medical Foundation volunteers helped decorate the Donate Life float, honoring people who have saved others’ lives through their organ donations.

**2/21/12** – In Mesa, Arizona, “Mesa’s Woman of the Year” was presented to Dr. Ruth Tan Lim, Phoenix TIMA coordinator, for her service to the community.

**3/22/12** – Tzu Chi and RAM collaborated again to provide eight days of free medical clinics—four days each in Oakland and Sacramento, California.

**3/9/13** – Tzu Chi Haiti volunteers held a major medical clinic, helping more than six hundred patients. Six doctors traveled from the United States to offer their assistance and present equipment to their Haitian counterparts.

**5/20/13** – Great Love Dental Mobile began offering weekly free dental services for low-income patients in Milpitas, on the outskirts of San Jose, California.

**6/22/13** – Great Love Vision Mobile joined the fleet of mobile medical vans, making its debut at the Care 4 a Healthy IE event in San Bernardino, California.

**11/1/13** – Tzu Chi Medical Foundation celebrated its twentieth anniversary by helping thousands of patients throughout the four-day Care Harbor clinic in downtown Los Angeles.

In **2013** alone, Tzu Chi Medical Foundation doctors, nurses, and volunteers

✓ treated **29,938** patients at Southern California clinic locations,

✓ delivered medical care to patients in Haiti and the Dominican Republic,

✓ held **69** medical outreach events throughout California, and

✓ treated **10,239** patients onsite during outreach events and health fairs, including

  ✓ **2,995** patients at Care Harbor LA in the Los Angeles Sports Arena and
  ✓ **1,607** patients at Care 4 a Healthy IE in San Bernardino, California.
Part Two: 
A Unique Pair of Street Performers

Shirley Tseng | Translated by Jolene Lee O'Connor

*A striking partnership reinvigorates this rebuilding city with the joy of music.*

Tourists visiting New Orleans always flock to the three-hundred-year-old historic French Quarter for its beautiful antique architecture, museums, and the oldest market in the country. It is the birthplace of jazz. In the many music clubs, visitors can enjoy New Orleans's signature cuisine and live music at the same time. Outside, street performers on every corner showcase their talents, including face painting, impersonations, musical performances, painting, and singing.

A few young men with beers in their hands—clearly out-of-towners—briefly pause their raucous laughter to stop at the corner and watch as two musicians perform their act. The duo is a pair of women: one Asian-American, the other African-American. One holds a violin, the other a guitar—a unique combination. Nearby, a horse-drawn carriage stops on the side of the road so that its driver and passengers may enjoy the performance together. As the women's song comes to an end, the driver turns to his passengers, "Don't ever miss their performance when you come to New Orleans."

A tipsy young man calls out to the driver, "Hey, how much did they pay you to say that?"

The driver says that nobody has to pay him. They really are that good. He snaps the reins, and the carriage continues on.

"Are you guys that good?" The young man moves closer, teasing them. "Can you play 'Lean on Me'?"

Without a word, the Asian-American woman sets the violin on her shoulder and glides her bow along its strings. Out comes the beautiful
something to say. Maybe I can connect with somebody with this song."

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their town, most residents relocated elsewhere. Over the years that followed, New Orleans slowly began to rebuild. Other than construction, most businesses had yet to recover. The city had not yet been returned to basic living conditions, and there weren’t any tourists around either. The majority of street performers remained out of town. Only a few returned.

Tanya and Dorise were among the first people to come back, and they began to perform regularly in front of a long-standing café in the French Quarter. Tanya recalled, "I remember looking out over the tables and everybody was in uniform, the majority were men, and I felt like I was in a military state. But it felt important at the time. People would see us and just thank us for coming back. They’d be crying."

Tanya’s maternal grandmother was a Buddhist nun, so she had long known about Tzu Chi and the charity work it has done around the world. Her late grandmother was even cared for at a Tzu Chi hospital before she passed away. Tanya said that she too wanted to find ways to contribute. In fact, she felt that her performances on the streets with Dorise were another way of getting rid of miseries and bringing happiness to others—bringing joy back into the city.

Sweat Equity

Music is not only the soul of New Orleans, but its main tourist attraction as well. In order to encourage musicians to come back to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, local musical luminaries Branford Marsalis and Harry Connick Jr. joined together with Habitat for Humanity after the storm to build Musicians’
Musicians’ Village, built after Hurricane Katrina, was meant to encourage music professionals to move back to New Orleans.

Photo: Shirley Tseng

Village—new homes for low-income music professionals.

Those qualified to purchase these homes were required to fulfill 350 hours of "sweat equity" in lieu of a down payment. This sweat equity consisted of helping to build the houses in the village. When Tanya’s application was accepted, she was delighted to put in the labor. She said, "You're required to come for a certain number of hours, but I said, forget that, I'm coming every day! I wanted to know everything about the house and all the layers. And if something went wrong, I wanted to fix it. And more importantly, I just wanted to meet the volunteers and thank them. It was just this really nice connection to meet them."

Tanya had always lived at her parents’ or friends’ homes or sometimes in a rented apartment. Now, because of Hurricane Katrina, she finally had her own home. "When you get the keys for the first time and you come in, it's just this great feeling!" With a place to call her own, and a job that she enjoyed, Tanya felt fully contented.

Musicians’ Village and many other homes built by charitable organizations were based on the principles of "green building," so they have given the historic city a brand new look. But Tanya’s musical partner Doris felt that the city’s rebirth has transcended all the material changes. "This is a critical history and a critical time. All the music, all the impressions, all the art, all the survival, all the rebuilding is really a serious restructuring mentally. It's part of that vacuum that allows attitudes and perceptions to change." From her perspective, the serious damage from Hurricane Katrina has served a cleansing purpose, bringing about an opportunity for positive change and growth.

**Cleansing the Earth**

Doris is more than a decade older than Tanya. Having taught for many years at a high school in a tough neighborhood, she is blessed with sharp observational skills and a deep understanding of the impact of street performers' work. "I feel like the effect that we have is positive on people. I see people fighting sometimes out on the streets. We play music..."
Tanya cares for the plants on her patio in Musicians’ Village. Photo: Shirley Tseng

and the fighting stops. I see people just coming here—homeless people who can’t go to clubs, who can’t go anywhere else, because they don’t smell too good—they can sit here and get some of the music and just chill out. Children who aren’t allowed in the clubs, they can get music.

She continued, ”An African-American woman and an Asian-American woman playing music, playing all kinds of music, it’s really important to this planet. It’s a very powerful visual, and it’s important that little kids’ imaginations are changed.”

Dorise was clearly worried about the world, with its many powerful media images trying to define how women and men should look, how they should talk, how they should act, and how much value they should place on money. “It’s a fantasy, it’s not even real, but it leaves people without the ability to discern who they should be and what their goals in life should really be about.”

On the street every day, Dorise had to use her energy and skill to deal with harassment, but she never let herself get frustrated. “A lot of what I try to focus on is to be a part of a current that is rejuvenating the earth and the mindset of people. Once the mind changes, almost anything can happen. It’s the types of music that we pick, it’s the types of joy that we try to bring that I think are really significant and powerful when we see thousands of people every day. They’re critical to changing the psyche of the planet.

"This is one little place, but I want to model that in some way, so that whatever historical trends and cultural identities New Orleans has had, we can maybe make a little shift to be different."

Once again Tanya’s violin began to sing; Dorise sat up straight and started strumming her guitar in accompaniment. They continued their unique partnership, bringing joy to people on the streets, and hopefully also a positive influence to the world.

For Part One, please see Issue 38 (Winter 2013).

Unity of hearts enables limitless accomplishments.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*
US TZU CHI 360°
New Episode Each Week

Real-life stories about US Tzu Chi volunteers active in their communities and around the world:
a view from all angles,
a view from all perspectives:

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Dharma Master Cheng Yen, and Tzu Chi This
Week, a half-hour weekly roundup of Tzu Chi
news from around the world.
Lost and drifting on samsara’s ocean tide
人生茫茫浮沈無際大海中
ren sheng mang mang fu chen wu ji da hai zhong

Don’t know where we come from, where we’re going, so unsatisfied
任由風浪漂浮隨境轉向何去何從
ren you fenglang piaofu sui jing zhuang xiang he qu he cong

Vow for Bodhi, search for wisdom worldwide
立願覺悟尋思宇宙真理海
li yuan jue wu xun si yu zou zheng li hai

In the Saha land, you’re free to wander, karma cast aside
從此解脫業力顯跡人間去來自在
cong ci jie tu ye li xian ji renjian qu lai zi zai

Time and Time Again, Awakening
生生世世都在菩提中
sheng sheng shi shi dou zai pu ti zhong

Music: Kuo Meng Yung 曲：郭孟雍
Lyrics: Master Cheng Yen’s Discourse 詞：證嚴上人開示
Translation: Reverend Heng Sure 譯：恒實法師
Video: Eddy Lin

Tzu Chi songs are composed based on the teachings of the sutras and Dharma Master Cheng Yen. When we sing the song, we are reminded of the way of the bodhisattvas in daily living. Please visit “The Song of Bodhisattvas” on www.us.tzuchi.org to watch a music video for this song.
Vow with the resolve of Dizang⁵
立地藏王菩萨的願
lì dì zàng wáng pú sà de yuàn

May all beings leave suffering
但願眾生得離苦
dàn yuàn zhòng shēng dé lí kǔ

Pledge with the great heart of Guanyin⁶
發觀世音菩薩的心
fā guān shì yīn pú sà de xīn

May this great compassion never end
但願愛心廣大無邊
dàn yuàn ài xīn guǎng dà wú biān

Vow with heart and mind
發心立志
fā xīn lì yuàn

Time and time again, awakening
生生世世都在菩提中
shēngshēng shì shì dōu zài pú tí zhōng

Minds and hearts, one resolve
立志發心
lì yuàn fā xīn

May all beings awaken time and time again
但願生生世世都在菩提中
dàn yuàn shēng shēng shì shì dōu zài pú tí zhōng

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¹ The cycle of existence: birth, life, death, and rebirth.
² The understanding of a buddha, enlightenment.
³ This world; the world which must be endured.
⁴ Actions in the cycle of cause and effect.
⁵ Ksitigarbha: bodhisattva who vowed to deliver all beings from suffering.
⁶ Avalokítēśvara: bodhisattva of compassion.
On September 21, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers and Tzu Ching collegiate volunteers from Johannesburg, South Africa, visited Ikamva Youth in Tembisa to introduce Tzu Chi to the students and to distribute rice and books. Photo: Meiya Xu

On September 29, 2013, Vietnam Tzu Chi volunteers partnered with the Red Cross to hold a free clinic and relief distribution for underprivileged villagers in Mộc Hóa on the Cambodia border. Photo: Baozhi Chen

Due to heavy rainfall, forty-five of Thailand’s seventy-six provinces were affected by floods in early October 2013. On October 13, Tzu Chi volunteers went to the disaster area of Si Maha Phot District and mobilized local volunteers to help cook hot meals for flood victims. Here, volunteers pack vegetarian box lunches. Photo: Shaoguang Huang

In Perth, Western Australia, volunteers held their first free dental clinic on November 2, 2013. In addition to providing dental treatment and health education, volunteers introduced Tzu Chi and the Bamboo Bank spirit. Photo: Shicheng Liu
On October 13, 2013, staff and volunteers celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Tzu Chi in Indonesia. Volunteers from the island of Biak in Papua province put on traditional costumes and acted out the development of Tzu Chi in Papua through a song and dance performance. Photo: Stephen Ang

Potential Question:
What event did Tzu Chi volunteers participate in on October 13, 2013, in Indonesia?

Potential Answer:
Tzu Chi volunteers participated in the twentieth anniversary celebration of Tzu Chi in Indonesia. Volunteers from the island of Biak in Papua province put on traditional costumes and acted out the development of Tzu Chi in Papua through a song and dance performance.

Potential Question:
What did the volunteers from Biak wear during the anniversary celebration?

Potential Answer:
The volunteers from Biak wore traditional costumes during the anniversary celebration.

Potential Question:
How many people attended the anniversary celebration?

Potential Answer:
More than 150 teachers and students attended the anniversary celebration.

Potential Question:
Where was the anniversary celebration held?

Potential Answer:
The anniversary celebration was held in Indonesia.

Potential Question:
When was the blood drive conducted in Jordan?

Potential Answer:
The blood drive was conducted on September 29, 2013, in Jordan.

Potential Question:
Who conducted the blood drive in Jordan?

Potential Answer:
Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan conducted the blood drive.

Potential Question:
Where was the blood drive conducted?

Potential Answer:
The blood drive was conducted at Sg Tali Primary School in Singapore.

Potential Question:
How many people attended the blood drive?

Potential Answer:
More than 150 teachers and students attended the blood drive in Singapore.

Potential Question:
What was the purpose of the blood drive?

Potential Answer:
The purpose of the blood drive was to provide free dental care to residents of Petra.
Typhoon Haiyan Special Report

Typhoon Haiyan, the strongest storm ever to make landfall, devastated the Philippines on November 8, 2013, just three weeks after the country was struck by a 7.2-magnitude earthquake. More than five thousand were killed, twenty-five thousand injured, and millions driven from their homes. Tzu Chi volunteers responded immediately. As of December 2, 2013, volunteers had delivered eighty pre-fabricated shelters, sixty thousand eco-friendly blankets, four hundred thousand servings of instant rice meals, and medical relief for several thousand storm survivors. In addition, a Cash-for-Work program was started on November 20 to engage locals in rebuilding their communities.

▲ Tzu Chi volunteers responded quickly to the disaster. On November 12, thirty thousand blankets and sixty thousand instant rice meals were flown to the disaster region to meet survivors’ immediate needs of food and warmth. Photo: Jianguo Chen

▲ Similar to worldwide responses after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers in more than thirty-five countries and regions across the globe gathered funds to help support those affected by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Here, young children in Atlanta, Georgia, seize the opportunity to help others. Photo: Jennifer An

The first group of Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) doctors and nurses headed to the disaster zone on November 13 to provide care to the injured. By early December, more than ninety doctors and nurses had provided treatment to thousands of patients. Here, doctors treat patients in Ormoc on November 22. Photo: Angeli Adviento
In the months prior to Typhoon Haiyan, a major armed conflict and Typhoon Nari destroyed many buildings—including schools—in the Southern Philippines. In response, Tzu Chi prepared 160 pre-fabricated classrooms to address needs in those communities. After Haiyan, eighty of these were first sent to the disaster area to serve as temporary shelters and medical service stations. Photo provided by Tzu Chi Foundation

Six hundred individuals participated in the first day of Cash-for-Work on November 20; eight days later, more than twenty thousand were participating each day. In appreciation for their efforts, each received 500 pesos (roughly $11). Several thousand others who were physically unable to participate were provided with hot meals. Photo: Richard Boisay

To help disaster survivors through the difficult days after the typhoon, volunteers from across the Philippines—and even from as far as the United States and Zimbabwe—held a number of relief distributions. By December 2, they had already provided cash relief to more than thirteen thousand households, while also distributing blankets, secondhand clothing, and bags of rice. Photo: Qingwen Zhang
The Turtle and the Otter

Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Compiled into English by the Dharma as Water Editorial Team

In our spiritual practice, we must have self-awareness. Always be mindful of and keep the Six Roots in check. When our minds are clear, the radiance of our wisdom can show us the way.
*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

In the Dharmapadavadana Sutra, there is a story about a man who had great aspirations of spiritual practice. Therefore, he left his home and went to a forest in the mountains to practice in solitude, hoping to attain liberation. But after twelve years of diligent hard work, he was still unable to truly tame his mind. This troubled him greatly.

Somehow, the Buddha knew about this man’s aspiration to practice and his inability to tame his mind. So, he went to the place where this practitioner was staying, near a small lake. When the Buddha arrived, the practitioner was sitting under a tree, meditating. The Buddha took on the appearance of an ordinary monk and quietly walked over to sit under the same tree. The two sat there silently, without disturbing each other.

After a while, a turtle crawled from the lake onto the shore. It extended its head and feet and walked forward very slowly. Just then a hungry otter came on shore and saw the turtle. The otter went after the turtle with its mouth open, trying to eat it. However, this turtle immediately contracted its feet and head into its hard shell. The otter flipped the turtle over repeatedly and attacked from different angles, but it was unable to find any spot soft enough to bite.

The hungry otter became so tired that it stopped and just stared at the turtle. Because things had quieted down, the turtle thought that it was free of danger, so it extended its head and feet again and walked forward. The otter saw this and once again went at the turtle. Again, the turtle contracted its limbs. This happened again and again. Finally, the otter became so tired it grudgingly gave up. The turtle stretched out its head once more to confirm that the otter was gone and then comfortably made its way forward.

The Buddha and the practitioner sat under the tree and quietly watched this scene unfold. After the turtle had walked away, the Buddha began to speak: “The body lasts not; all returns to dust. Form decays, the spirit leaves, why be attached? Thoughts form in the mind, drift about for no reason. With these deviant thoughts, we attract much suffering.”

With this verse, the Buddha explains that although we have this body now, our life is impermanent. There will certainly come a time when our life ends and we return to the earth. When our physical body decays and disappears, where does our mind-consciousness, our spirit, go? This body is nothing more than a place where our spirit resides. It is like a house; once a house falls apart, the occupant has to leave.
So what is there to be attached to? Yet we still have cravings and desires for the pleasures of the senses. Furthermore, our minds drift to the past and the future, giving rise to distractions and delusions. Such discursive thoughts lead us astray and foster negative habitual tendencies; this is how we bring calamities upon ourselves.

The Buddha then continued: “This suffering is created by your mind, not by your parents. Train yourself to follow what is right, create blessings and do not regress. Hide the Six Roots like a turtle, guard the mind like a fortress. When wisdom battles evil, its victory eliminates suffering.”

Here, he teaches that we ourselves create these deviant thoughts and habitual tendencies, and by acting on them we ourselves suffer the consequences. We created this suffering, it was not caused by our parents or by other people. Since we know this, we need to train ourselves to take the right path and stay on it. But if we practice only for our own awakening, even when we are sitting in a quiet place we may still give rise to discursive thoughts. Therefore we must do good deeds and create blessings for others. As we do so, we should not have regrets nor stop what we are doing.

As spiritual practitioners, we must learn to be like turtles. The Six Roots, which are our six senses, are like the turtle’s head, tail, and feet. If we can retract them like a turtle, we can prevent ourselves from being harmed. Turtles may live to be hundreds or thousands of years old because they are vigilant and know to protect themselves, like warriors donning armor to enter battle.

In the same way, the mind of a practitioner is like a kingdom. A kingdom will build walls so it can withstand an enemy attack. If the fortress walls are solid, they will be difficult to penetrate. This is how we can prevent the outside world from defeating us. In this battle in our minds, we must call upon our wisdom to defeat evil. Only with wisdom can we prevail. When we use wisdom to defeat the evils of the mind and maintain our will to practice, we can eliminate suffering and open our hearts.

When this spiritual practitioner heard the Buddha’s words, he suddenly had a great awakening. His desires completely disappeared and his discursive thoughts ceased. By understanding one principle, he comprehended all principles and completed his spiritual practice. So, although spiritual practice may sound complicated, it is actually quite simple. Once we are determined, nothing in this world will be difficult.
Mapo Tofu

Recipe provided by Vegetarian Cooking Team
Tzu Chi University Continuing Education Center

Ingredients:
19 oz. Soft Tofu (cubed)
3 slices Ginger (minced)
1 Shiitake Mushroom (diced)
1 pinch fresh Cilantro (minced)

Seasonings:
1 tbsp Oil
1 tbsp Hot (Chili) Bean Paste
1 tbsp Soy Sauce
1/2 tbsp Dark Soy Sauce
1 pinch White Pepper Powder
1 pinch Mushroom Essence
1/2 tsp Salt
1 tbsp Potato Starch
1 cup Water

Optional:
2 tbsp Veggie Ground Pork
1 drop Szechuan Peppercorn Oil

Directions
1. Fill a medium saucepan halfway with water, add salt, and bring to boil.
2. Add cubed tofu to boiling water and return to boil. As soon as water starts to boil, strain tofu and set aside.
3. In a heated pan, add oil followed by minced ginger and hot bean paste. Sauté until fragrant, then add diced mushroom and veggie ground pork (if desired), and continue to sauté. Add water, soy sauce, dark soy sauce, white pepper powder, and mushroom essence. Mix well.
4. In a separate small bowl, mix the potato starch with a teaspoon of water. This will be used to thicken the sauce.
5. When the sauce in the pan begins to bubble, add the cooked tofu cubes and gently coat them with the sauce. Cook until the sauce begins to bubble again.
6. Slowly add a small amount of the potato starch mixture to the sauce and stir. Wait a few seconds. If the sauce is still too runny, add a little more potato starch mixture and stir. Repeat until the sauce reaches the desired consistency. (Do not pour in all of the potato starch mixture at once; this could result in a very thick, sticky sauce.)
7. If desired, sprinkle a drop of Szechuan peppercorn oil into the sauce and stir. Sprinkle the minced cilantro on top and remove from heat.
8. Plate and serve.

Vegetarianism cultivates perseverance, compassion, and wisdom.
Jing Si Aphorism
by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Learning from Elders

Michelle Fang

A collegiate volunteer in Illinois gains valuable perspective.

Life is good and it becomes even better when I spend some time with elders in the senior home. After four months, I finally had the chance to go back and see some familiar faces, although they might have already forgotten me completely. Every time being here at Meadowbrook Health Center is a surprise, and this visit was not an exception.

No matter what I do here with the elders, whether baking cookies or playing bingo, it always cheers me up. This time when I volunteered, something happened and it not only made my day but also showed me that some things are never forgotten. The old lady was one whom I only spent a few minutes with when I tried to share some cookies with her last time. At that time, she was not friendly at all and kept pushing my hands away from her. Although she finally took some cookies and ate them, I was greatly discouraged by her actions and felt embarrassed.

This time, when I was walking past her four months later, she reached out to me and held my hands tightly. I was surprised at her doing that; I thought she would have already forgotten about me and that even if she did remember me, the memory would be awful as she was trying to push my hands away from her last time. But this time, while holding my hands tightly, she looked at me with excitement in her eyes.

I could never imagine that she would still remember me after four months. I thought four months were long enough to forget about someone with little importance. But this is probably not the case for these elders. Four months are not long compared to the time they have lived through.

Good deeds in the past will never disappear but will be carried on into the future. The impact we may have on others can never be correctly determined. Even something we think is trivial is sometimes significant for others. The elders at Meadowbrook continue to say they wish for us to return, which I feel to be the best thing I could expect. It means what we do is worthy and actually makes an impact. For me personally, it is a blessing that I could have such an opportunity to spend some time with elders. What they teach me is nothing technical, but rather spiritual advancement. God bless those elders. I wish them the best.
A Joyful Park Cleaning

Frank Xu

In Columbus, Ohio, cleaning a park is not a chore, but a fun-filled adventure.

A park cleaning! It always feels like we don’t have enough of them. Getting a chance to go outside, eating yummy food, finding interesting garbage, doing community service, and eating more yummy food all in one delicious serving? Now that’s what I call a full-course meal.

The day started off tentatively, as a couple of dark clouds lingered from the mild rain we got the day before. The sky looked like a confrontation of good versus evil, split into one half picnic perfect and the other half zombie apocalypse. Uncertainty was certainly a prevalent theme for me today. Would it rain? Would enough people attend? Would we find any garbage? Would there be that tasty rice I always enjoyed? Furthermore, I was also delegated the role of cameraman to record the event, a change-up from the usual park cleaning I had gotten so accustomed to. Yet, overall, my mind was at ease. Tzu Chi volunteering had never been anything short of phenomenal, and today would be no exception.

As the day went on, the whole process gained momentum. Many volunteers arrived in the parking lot, and a few of the local Tzu Ching collegiate volunteers biked or walked. Another upside to attending park cleanings, and Tzu Chi events in general, is meeting with all the wonderful friends. Work transformed into productive play as we merrily got started.

A unique add-on this time around were the garbage pinchers. Long sticks with U-shaped ends for grabbing things, the pinchers had an addicting quality about them. They became especially helpful as the slightly wet ground proved treacherous to an unfocused victim (me). After a near-catastrophic fall off the ledge of the bike path, I remembered that park cleaning, while fun, was no joke.

Now, it wouldn’t be the ordinary park cleaning without finding some extraordinary trash, and on this day we found a shopping cart along with a usable chain! Taking pictures felt surprisingly natural to me, because there were so many engaged Tzu Chi volunteers. Alas, the morning could not last forever, and before I knew it we were already heading back for a rewarding lunch.

One by one, all my concerns had been abated. Driving away, I looked up and saw the sky had fully cleared up with only cute, fluffy white clouds to be spotted, as if it were an oddly coincidental metaphor for this whole event.

Tzu Ching collegiate volunteers work together to reassemble a table.
Photo: Frank Xu

Volunteers meticulously remove trash from the roadside.
Photo Frank Xu
Me and My Community: Now and Future
Shaw Mo

Tutoring students in Indianapolis, Indiana, share their thoughts through journal entries.

For the next five years, my community and I will have a better life than we have right now. Right now, my community works hard just to survive. They know how hard it is without education. I want them to spend more time studying things such as learning English. They will have to go step by step so that they could be better able and prepared to start to face the American life.

My community members must be better educated so they will learn to stop playing poker or using drugs and start doing positive things for their lives. If they become educated people, they will know how to save money, how to take care of their families, how to be good parents, and how to take care of themselves so they do not get sick.

When it comes to responsibility, I will help my community when they are in trouble. My community will also correct me when I make mistakes. I will help them work together so that we can understand each other and get along. I will avoid being selfish or greedy and help my community to do the same.

In America it is hard to share money but we can share love to fill the void in our life. Everyone needs to help each other to get rid of pain. Instead of just me being happy, my community being happy is more important to me.

The author celebrates high school graduation.
Photo: Dong-Chang Shiue

Hidden Rules among Classes
Sun Light

I think I am in middle class, because I am neither poor nor rich. Sometimes my family has been through hard situations. However, we still can overcome it. Compared to when I lived in the refugee camp, I think my life is now becoming much better. Back then, we had a lot of struggles. Sometimes, we did not have enough rations for our family and there were less opportunities to take. Now we are in the United States and these needs are non-existent. What we need is to think about how to meet our future needs.

There is never enough for us in this world.

Sometimes, we have to fight for our own living to achieve our goals. As I am a student in high school, I have thoughts of many things to change the way I live. Sometimes, I think of living in a better house and owning my own property. In order to change how I live now, I need to have more self-improvement, such as trying hard in school and money management.

In conclusion, I am not poor nor rich. I am in middle class and trying to meet my ideal class. I have to work hard in order to meet this need. I believe that life is complicated and sometimes it is not fair. It is up to us to choose how to live.
On April 14, 1966, Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Merits Society in Hualien with the support of thirty housewives who each put aside a couple cents of their grocery money every day to establish a charity fund. During the first five years, they helped a total of thirty-one elderly, ill, and poor people from fifteen families. As word spread, more people participated and the program gathered strength. It spread beyond Hualien: across the island and around the world.

Today, Tzu Chi is a nonprofit charitable organization with ten million volunteers and donors in more than fifty countries worldwide. Over the past forty-seven years, Tzu Chi’s four missions—Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanistic Culture—have grown from the seeds of gratitude, respect, and love, and Tzu Chi’s activities have expanded to include international disaster relief, bone marrow donation, community volunteerism, and environmental conservation.

In the United States, Tzu Chi operates nine regional service areas with more than eighty offices nationwide. Volunteers give back to their local communities through family services, emergency disaster services, homeless services, school support programs, college scholarships, income tax reporting assistance, relief distributions, holiday care packs, free and low-cost medical clinics and outreaches, preventive health education, cancer support groups, character education curricula, community education classes, and production of positive, inspiring media.

Whenever disaster strikes at home or abroad, Tzu Chi volunteers deliver cash aid, hot meals, and emergency relief supplies directly into the hands of disaster survivors. Over the years, US Tzu Chi volunteers have actively provided relief after such major disasters as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and Hurricane Sandy.

In recent years, Tzu Chi volunteers’ charitable work has been increasingly recognized by the global community. In 2010, Tzu Chi was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In 2011, Dharma Master Cheng Yen was recognized with the Roosevelt Institute’s FDR Distinguished Public Service Award and named to the 2011 TIME 100 list of the world’s most influential people. In 2013, Tzu Chi was honored by the White House for its Hurricane Sandy disaster relief efforts.
Being needed by others, having the ability to serve—this is truly the most blessed life.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen