Tzu Chi USA Transitions to Long Term Care Through COVID-19

Messengers at the Forefront of Vegetarian and Vegan Living

A Journey to Save Lives in Indian Country

Compassion Has No Borders: A Nun’s Story
With social distancing and quarantine measures due to the pandemic, who can offer help for those who are suffering? It takes people with the heart of a bodhisattva who vow to walk the Bodhisattva Path.

Let us learn the Buddha Dharma and take it to heart so we can put its teachings into practice. May we live our lives with the mindset of spiritual practitioners. With the compassion of a bodhisattva, let us go among people to help those who are suffering.

In times of hardship, if we can help calm everyone’s hearts, there will come a day when the suffering is behind us.
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By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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Tzu Chi USA Directory
Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief has launched an inaugural webinar

The C.A.F.E.229 webinar, hosted by the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief located at 229 East 60th Street in New York, casts a light on different aspects of contemplative living, and their benefits for self and others. Examined from a variety of perspectives, a contemplative lifestyle will emerge as one that encompasses altruistic tendencies, mindfulness and positive transformation, and wisdom. These themes are echoed in the words that constitute the C.A.F.E. name: Compassion in Action, Freedom, Enlightenment.

Speakers will come from the fields of psychology, health care, clinical research, religious practice and studies, philosophy, arts and culture, communications, global studies, and service-learning. And, the webinar will run in series.

Tune in at 4 PM PST | 6 PM CST | 7 PM EST on the third Friday of each month until December 2020, for SERIES 1 of the webinar

Transforming Distress into Compassion:
Mindful Living in Action

The next speaker, on September 18, will be Dr. Deborah Middleton, who leads the Mindfulness and Performance Research Project at the University of Huddersfield (UK), and is co-editor of the Journal of Performance and Mindfulness. Under the pen-name Deborah Templeton, she is also a writer, yoga teacher, and facilitator of workshops and courses in the ‘Yoga of Creativity.’

Dr. Middleton will talk about contemplative arts as a way to develop mindfulness and compassion. Drawing on examples of contemplative writing and performance, she will look at how the arts can allow us to practice mindfulness-in-action, and how mindfulness leads to the cultivation of heartfelt compassion. We’ll consider the particular power of the poetic to awaken our hearts – to each other, and to nature.

To register and learn more visit: www.tzuchicenter.org
Since our last issue, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives, cause illness, create economic hardship, and transform daily life for billions of people worldwide. Tzu Chi USA's distributions of personal protective equipment (PPE) have been ongoing, as we incorporated more long-term pandemic relief under the umbrella of our Together While Apart campaign.

Concurrently, we’ve put an extra push on our mission to promote vegetarianism. Adopting a plant-based diet can improve overall health, thereby boosting immunity, which is vital during a global health crisis. Abandoning the eating of meat can also help avert outbreaks of zoonotic diseases. And, it is rooted in compassion for all sentient beings, which is at the heart of Buddhism, and in line with Tzu Chi’s Buddhist philosophy.

In fact, Issue #58 marks the launch of Tzu Chi USA’s new Very Veggie Movement, an educational initiative advocating a meatless diet, and aiming to unify individuals around the causes of animal rights and environmental protection.

Our cover story, “Tzu Chi USA Transitions to Long Term Care Through COVID-19” paints how Tzu Chi USA has shifted to long-term relief efforts that combine the provision of essentials while advocating plant-based diets, through distributions of free, healthy, nutritious and vegetarian groceries and products.

To inspire and inform about the benefits of a meat-free lifestyle, “Messengers at the Forefront of Vegetarian and Vegan Living” presents a myriad of resources to explore, from websites and publications to documentary films and books.

“A Journey to Save Lives in Indian Country,” our next feature story, then takes us to Arizona, where Tzu Chi volunteers have been providing PPE to healthcare facilities serving the Navajo, Hopi, and Apache nations. The Navajo Nation, in particular, is among the populations hardest-hit in terms of positive COVID-19 cases.

Our feature portrait, “Compassion Has No Borders: A Nun’s Story,” introduces Sister Marilyn Lacey, founder of the non-profit Mercy Beyond Borders, and highlights how as per Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s reminder, Tzu Chi’s aid pays attention to the needs of nuns and priests, creating marvelous connections rooted in a shared vision of unconditional love and giving.

To add extra nuance to our focus on vegetarianism, our second portrait, “Becoming a Vegetarian: Everyone Has Their Story,” explores the variety of reasons people give for their decision to abandon the consumption of meat. It invites the reader to reflect on what may motivate them to follow suit.

Finally, we’re pleased to announce the start of a new webinar program hosted by the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief: C.A.F.E.229 (Compassion in Action, Freedom, Enlightenment), which offers talks and dialogue on the topic of contemplative living. Our issue also features multimedia sections presenting more about Tzu Chi USA’s activities nationwide and internationally. We hope the stories inspire and bring hope at this challenging time. 🌿

By Anik Ghose and Ida Eva Zielinska

www.tzuchi.us
The Buddha teaches us that we must make an effort to discipline our minds. We must transform anger, resentment, and hatred into love and understanding. At every moment we must be forgiving and loving toward others.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen

I often tell everyone that in cultivating ourselves, we need to take good care of our minds. In the course of our spiritual practice, we should cultivate ourselves and also help others do the same. If others are better at something than we are, we should praise them rather than feel jealous of them. And if others happen to be jealous of us and hurt us, what should we do? Should we take an eye for an eye? Should we exact revenge? If we take the road to hurt others when they hurt us, the cycle of revenge will never cease. But if we can transcend all boundaries and accommodate everything, there will be no resentment or hatred. To truly eliminate resentment and hatred, we should help others to be successful. There is a story about this.

In the state of Liang in ancient China, there was a magistrate named Song Jiu, who governed a county bordering the state of Chu. He always hoped that the people of Liang could live in harmony with the people of Chu. The people of both states planted watermelons. After the seeds were sown, the people of Liang worked diligently to water and fertilize their plants. Thus, their melons grew very well. But the people of Chu were indolent, and they didn't water or fertilize their plants properly. Thus, when the time to harvest came, their melons were small and there weren't many of them. When the people of Chu saw so many big and beautiful melons in Liang, they were angry and jealous. So, they decided to destroy the melons in Liang.

When night fell, the people of Chu set to work. The next morning, the people of Liang saw that their melons were trampled and crushed. They wondered what had happened, so they began guarding their fields at night. Eventually, they came to see that it was the individuals from Chu who had destroyed their melons.
The people of Liang were very angry, but instead of acting impulsively, they reported the matter to an officer. The officer didn’t know what to do, so he took them to see magistrate Song Jiu. Song Jiu said to them, “Evil only begets resentment and disaster. When others are mean to us, if we seek revenge by doing unto them what they have done to us, it will only deepen their hatred even more. The people of Chu are angry because their melons didn’t grow well. If you can help their melons grow as good as yours, I’m sure they will live in peace with us.”

So, the people of Liang started to water and fertilize the melons at Chu in the night. After some time, the melons from Chu grew bigger and better. The people from Chu wondered: “Why are our melons growing so well? It looks like we’ll have a better harvest soon.” They went to their fields at night and saw what the people of Liang did for them. So, the people of Chu were very grateful. By returning good for evil, the people of Liang dissolved the enmity the people of Chu had toward them.

In life, to cultivate ourselves spiritually, we should open our hearts and be understanding and forgiving, even if we are hurt. Regardless of how others treat us if we can put ourselves in other people’s shoes, will we give rise to resentment, hate, jealousy, or enmity toward others? Absolutely not. We should mindfully reflect upon ourselves and examine ourselves at all times. Good or bad, whatever we do sows a seed in our consciousness, and we will reap the fruit later on. By exacting revenge, the cycle of revenge will never cease. However, being kind to others is always helpful to our spiritual cultivation. By opening our hearts, we can bring enlightenment to ourselves and others.
TZU CHI USA TRANSITIONS TO LONG TERM CARE THROUGH COVID-19

By Dilber Shatursun

Tzu Chi Southern Region volunteers load groceries into the trunks of cars.
Photo/Megane Lin
September marks the seventh official month of the COVID-19 pandemic. With it comes another month of change and uncertainty; that includes for San Bernardino, California resident Amalia Esparza and her children. “Their schools are now closed, they’ve watched their dad and uncle become unemployed, and they’ve become anxious as a result,” she describes. Worse yet, Amalia says her kids “were afraid we were going to get sick. What would the kids do without us?”

Families just like Amalia’s have had to quickly confront troubling questions like these in 2020; others have been forced to figure this out for themselves. In the United States alone, hundreds of thousands have died from COVID-19. Swathes remain unemployed or underemployed. Grief, fear, and prolonged anxiety have reigned. Witnessing the suffering now felt by people of all walks of life, Tzu Chi USA has sought to put its compassion into action through meaningful solutions.

Transitioning its immediate pandemic relief efforts into long term recovery, the “Together While Apart” fundraiser was created as a way to offer love and compassion to the struggling, even as we keep a physical distance. Specifically, it would fund efforts to relieve food insecurity, expand personal protective equipment (or PPE) donations, and offer whatever services were necessary for individual communities. With these three goals, Tzu Chi volunteers across the country have rolled up their sleeves – and put their masks on – to get to work.

In the spring, Tzu Chi volunteers had already begun devising new ways to turn their pre-pandemic, vegetarian food pantries into socially distant and safe grocery giveaways. They included drive-thru methods, where recipients would be asked to arrive in their cars, pop their trunks or side doors, and allow Tzu Chi volunteers to place packages of food (including fresh produce and pantry items) into their vehicles – eliminating any need for interpersonal contact. For those who did not drive, pickup stations, as appropriate, were set up, too.
Such mindful measures were replicated across the country, and included social distancing, mask-wearing, and constant disinfecting to minimize risk to volunteers and recipients. Still, for some it was the beginning of something new, like at Tzu Chi Southern Region’s campus in Houston, TX, which held its first pair of food distributions (pandemic or not) in June. Executive Director Taishan Huang expressed that it was a program he hoped his office could always start.

Back in San Bernardino, Amalia arrives to pick up groceries from Tzu Chi volunteers at the Juanita Blakely Jones Elementary School in July. It is the second such distribution there, with the first having taken place in May. The summer sun blisters down on her. Though it’s a hot day, she explains that the free groceries will help her allocate her current budget elsewhere: “the money we save on food, we use it to buy gasoline or buy other necessities.”

Dangerous Connections

While the pandemic has presented new economic challenges, many communities were already familiar with hardship. This includes in La Puente, CA, where the Principal of Villacorta Elementary School, Dr. George Herrera, estimates that roughly 90% of his students came from already low-income households. Before the pandemic, he explains that hunger was a chronic issue, and that he’d regularly have to send students to the cafeteria “because they didn’t get anything to eat the night before.”

For this reason, Tzu Chi volunteers had been hosting food distributions in La Puente regularly since 2018. Miriam Kim, Rowland Unified School District’s Director of Outreach & Community Relations, elaborated that during the pandemic, “families in this area truly do depend on this food distribution and they mark it in their calendars because they know that their income cannot sustain them and their food supplies for the month.” Nevertheless, income inequality and COVID-19 are proving to have bleaker correlations.

In March, the New York Times reported that low-income earners were not only more likely to catch the coronavirus disease but also to die from it. If they survived or went virus-free, others “are likelier to suffer loss of income or health care as a result of quarantines and other measures.” What’s more, lower income is associated with a greater prevalence of chronic illnesses including diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and more; major risk factors that can make a case of COVID-19 a death sentence. But, it gets worse.

New research from the APM Research Lab also indicates that those who are Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Latino all have higher rates of mortality from COVID-19 than White Americans. This is not because of a biological reason, asserts Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s leading coronavirus expert, in a White House press briefing in early April. Rather, he said, that it was because people of color, including African-Americans, experience the exact same chronic diseases low-income earners do – making the need for specialized attention even more pressing.
Laser-Focused Care

Grocery giveaways and food distributions have sought to address community-specific needs. They’ve taken place in cities as large as San Francisco, CA and Chicago, IL, to more suburban areas like Long Island, NY and Silver Spring, MD. Tzu Chi volunteers have even ventured into agricultural communities like in California’s Central and Salinas Valleys, where they brought Jing Si Rice and Instant Noodles (part of a 760 box shipment from Hualien, Taiwan) to farmworkers.

For many who work such blue-collar jobs, and for particularly those who may be undocumented, the pandemic has been challenging on another level. Without defined immigration status, many don’t qualify for unemployment benefits and other forms of traditional aid. Fernando Viscaino, a Queens resident, shared that he’d regularly work in construction, but since the pandemic began, “there isn’t much work available now,” making ends more difficult to meet.

To distribute food to severely affected families, Brigada de Esperanza NY – a grassroots organization whose motto translates to “migrant brother, you are not alone” – began partnering with Tzu Chi New York in May to serve the Queens neighborhoods of Jackson Heights and Corona. Here, Brigada Board Member and NY Supreme Court Justice Carmen Velázquez, PhD, says, “there are people who are afraid simply because they had a really bad experience with the police or other groups.”
However, given Justice Velázquez’s role as a public servant, she clarified that the needs of her fellow human beings came before any matters of immigration status. Firmly, she said “yes, I am a supreme court judge, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to be looking out for who’s who. We came to help our community.” With both caring for the needs of the vulnerable, the two organizations reinforced the fact that helping one another was the smartest and most hopeful way forward.

Receiving a donation of food from Tzu Chi NY and Brigada volunteers, Fernando explained that the free groceries and positivity of the volunteers gave him are “going to help us get through these difficult moments.” María Criollo, another Queens resident, shared that she’d been widowed since 2017 with three mouths to feed at home. At the start of the pandemic, she explained “I gave them two meals, but now, thanks to the food I received, I can provide breakfast and snacks. They’re going to be so happy today.”

As food distributions continued, so did donations of PPE. Tzu Chi volunteers have been distributing them to hospitals and medical centers, senior homes, local governments and organizations, and more – even adding small packets of surgical masks or reusable cloth masks on occasion in grocery packages. However, new territory was traversed when Tzu Chi Northwest and Headquarters regions began holding testing events this summer.

In partnership with the County of Santa Clara, CA, Tzu Chi Northwest Region’s Milpitas Service Center turned into a COVID-19 testing site on July 2. Tzu Chi volunteers helped facilitate the event, controlling traffic, preparing the test site, monitoring social distancing guidelines, and performing check-ins. The County, having sent in nine medical personnel, conducted tests for 154 individuals. Of the accomplishment, Minjhing Hsieh, Tzu Chi Northwest Region Executive Director, expressed it was the right time for him and his fellow volunteers to “take on more responsibility to contribute to the community.”
In the same vein, Tzu Chi USA teamed up with Medical Task Force International to provide COVID-19 antibody testing on July 26. Performed at Tzu Chi USA’s San Dimas, CA, headquarters, testing was performed for 100 pre-registered attendees. Results were provided within an hour and would either inform of current infection or IgG or IgM antibody presence. Like the testing event held by Tzu Chi Northwest Region, these would help individuals make more informed decisions but also provide valuable data to municipalities as they look toward reopening efforts.

Compassion for the Long Haul

As the pandemic pushes forward, volunteers across Tzu Chi have been showing how willing they are to connect with their neighbors in need, and for many, despite their personal hardships or health risks. Even at a July distribution in California, San Bernardino School Police Department Sergeant John Gutierrez remarked that “your volunteers are out here in the hot sun, it’s 90 degrees, and they’re putting food into people’s cars and they’re directing traffic.” To him, their devotion was clear: “[it’s] all because they care about a community and they want to give back, and that brings hope.” 🌿
MESSENGERS AT THE FOREFRONT OF VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN LIVING

By Ida Eva Zielinska

According to a 2018 gallup poll, 5% of adults in the United States are vegetarian, with 3% reporting they’re vegan. If you’re ready to join the meat-free movement or interested in learning why such a diet is beneficial for reasons of personal and planetary health as well as animal welfare, there are plenty of resources to inform and inspire.

Here are a few websites, publications or online communities worth exploring (listed alphabetically):

**HappyCow**
An evolving online hub and international restaurant and health food store guide serving those passionate about the vegan lifestyle as a healthy, compassionate, and environmentally sustainable way of living.

**Plant Based News**
The world's leading multi-award-winning health, environmental, vegan media, entertainment and education platform.

**PlantBased Magazine**
The ultimate resource for vegan recipes. The magazine’s aim is to provide vegan meal ideas that are easy to follow and simple to cook.

**The Vegan Society Magazine**
The award-winning magazine of the Vegan Society (which coined the term "vegan" and was founded in 1944), providing updates, ideas, motivation and resources.

**Vegan Food and Living**
The fastest-growing UK magazine celebrating the delicious vegan approach to ethical eating, and featuring recipes, ingredient focuses, expert guides to nutrition, important ethical issues, the latest news, and more.

**Vegan Health & Fitness**
The first internationally distributed magazine to promote a healthy plant-based, active lifestyle. It continues to lead the way in providing cutting edge information on nutrition and exercise.

**Vegetarian Times Magazine**
Home to one of the largest collections of vegetarian recipes, vegetarian cooking tips, and lifestyle content online. The word “vegetarian” doesn’t just define a diet – it’s a way of life.

**VegNews**
As America’s best-selling plant-based magazine, this widely-awarded publication offers the very best vegan recipes, news, travel, celebrity interviews, fashion, beauty, and more.

**VEGWORLD Magazine**
Serving up the latest in “vegan & plant-based buzz,” cutting-edge health information, celebrity news, and exclusive interviews, scrumptious recipes, and compassionate and human interest stories.

These thought-provoking documentary films are also a must-see:

**Eating You Alive (2018)**
Half of all adults in the U.S. struggle with chronic health conditions. This film takes a scientific look at the reasons we’re so sick, who’s responsible for feeding us the wrong information, and how we can use whole-food, plant-based nutrition to take control of our health – one bite at a time.

**Dominion (2018)**
Exposing the dark underbelly of modern animal agriculture and questioning the morality and validity of humankind’s dominion over the animal kingdom. While mainly focusing on animals used for food, it also explores other ways animals are exploited and abused for clothing, entertainment, and research.
The Game Changers (2018)
Tell the story of an elite Special Forces trainer and The Ultimate Fighter winner as he travels the world on a quest to uncover the optimal diet for human performance. What he discovers permanently changes his understanding of food and his definition of true strength.

What the Health (2017)
Exposes the collusion and corruption in government and big business that is costing us trillions of healthcare dollars, and keeping us sick. The film is a groundbreaking follow-up from the creators of the award-winning documentary Cowspiracy (see below).

Food Choices (2016)
This documentary follows the filmmaker on a three-year journey as he explores the impact that food choice has on people’s health, the health of our planet, and on the lives of other species sharing our world. It looks at many misconceptions about food and diet, offering a new view on these issues.

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret (2014)
Focusing on animal agriculture, the leading cause of deforestation, water consumption and pollution, responsible for more greenhouse gases than the transportation industry, and a primary driver of rainforest destruction, species extinction, habitat loss, topsoil erosion, ocean “dead zones,” and other environmental ills.

Ghosts in Our Machine (2013)
Except for companion animals and the wild and stray species within our urban environments, we experience animals daily only as the food, clothing, animal-tested goods, and entertainment we make of them. This film illuminates the lives of animals living within and rescued from the machine of our modern world.

Forks Over Knives (2011)
Examines the claim that chronic diseases can be controlled or even reversed by rejecting animal-based and processed foods. The film follows Americans with chronic conditions as they seek to reduce their dependence on medications and learn to use a whole-food, plant-based diet to regain control over their health and lives.

Earthlings (2005)
About humankind’s absolute economic dependence on animals raised as pets, and for food, clothing, entertainment, and scientific research. Using hidden cameras, it chronicles the day-to-day practices at some of the largest industries in the world, all of which rely entirely on animals for profit.

If books are your passion, do check out these best-sellers to start:

How Not to Die (2015; Michael Greger)
New York Times bestseller from the internationally-recognized lecturer, physician, and founder of the trusted website NutritionFacts.org, who reveals the groundbreaking scientific evidence behind the only diet that can prevent and reverse many of the causes of premature death and disability.

The Plant-Based Diet for Beginners (2019; Gabriel Miller)
A #1 Amazon bestseller that features whole-food recipes for those who want to switch from eating meat, dairy, and eggs, to eating vegetables, whole grains, and other plant-based foods. Offers nutritional facts, a guide to eating plant-based even if you don’t want to cook, tips for stocking the kitchen, and more.

You can also look for inspiration by following famous vegans and vegetarians, some of whom are quite vocal about their lifestyle choices. These 25 celebrities from the entertainment, sports, or political sector – named alphabetically – are just a few.

Pamela Anderson, Christina Applegate, Tom Brady, Gisele Bündchen, James Cameron, Bill Clinton, Miley Cyrus, Ellen DeGeneres, Al Gore, Ariana Grande, Daryl Hannah, Woody Harrelson, Anne Hathaway, Ashley Judd, Madonna, Paul McCartney, Joaquin Phoenix, Natalie Portman, Shania Twain, Mike Tyson, Forest Whitaker, Olivia Wilde, Serena Williams, Venus Williams, Kate Winslet.

And, there are celebrities in the making joining the field as well, such as nine-year-old activist Vegan Evan, who recently proposed a “Make America Healthy Again” campaign and challenged President Donald Trump to go vegan for 30 days.

“I think that veganism is a gift and it’s great to give that gift to people so they can be healthier and feel better, not hurt animals, and not destroy the planet.”

Vegan Evan

We here at Tzu Chi USA agree with you, Evan, and hope that more people will join the cause by adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet.
A JOURNEY TO SAVE LIVES IN INDIAN COUNTRY

By Pheel Wang, Ren Liu, Arthur Lai, Amy Stallman
Translated by Penny Liu
Edited by Ida Eva Zielinska
Eagles fly across the sky over the Navajo Nation, the largest Native American reservation in the United States. Their piercing cries echo down to white water rapids snaking through a red canyon, merging with howling wind. A pair of owls stand near a nest, guarding their eggs. Rattlesnakes and rats rush over ancient fossils, hurrying for shelter in nooks and crannies to avoid becoming an eagle’s next meal.

In Navajoland, during the spring and summer of 2020, birds and animals are out and about, moving freely since popular attractions such as Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Horseshoe Bend, and Antelope Canyon, show no trace of tourists – or any humans for that matter. Even the American Indian residents here rarely go out now.
Some households put up a sign at the entrance to their driveway to prevent vehicles from entering: COVID-19 Self-Quarantine. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde

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The proud people of the Navajo Nation are staying inside their ramshackle houses, scattered across the land. A family with a dozen members won’t seek medical care even after several test positive for COVID-19, because many relatives, friends, and neighbors never made it home after going to the hospital: Young people being no exception.

Handwashing Is a Luxury

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. in March, everybody's focus was on the East Coast and cities with dense populations. In Phoenix, Tzu Chi volunteers followed the news while delivering personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline healthcare workers and first responders in big cities in Arizona. Until, one day in the middle of April, TV news reports about the Navajo Nation caught their attention.

One particular story featured a reporter walking toward a well, with a microphone at the ready. Reaching the well, one could see cars lined up with big buckets in tow, the drivers waiting to fill them. The TV journalist then explained that 30 to 40% of residents on the Navajo Reservation don’t have running water.

"Without running water, how do they wash their hands as often as recommended?" That was Ren Liu’s first shocked reaction. This most basic of preventive measures is a luxury on the reservation. On top of which, many Navajo families have multiple generations living together: If one person gets the virus, everyone in the family is at risk.

Ren Liu, Director of Tzu Chi USA’s Phoenix Service Center, has always enjoyed the great outdoors and camping. He used to go to the reservation with his wife and children often and has a basic understanding of how the local people live. He immediately got in touch with another volunteer, Arthur Lai, to discuss how to deliver PPE to the Navajo Nation as soon as possible.

The governors of the three states that the Navajo Reservation straddles, occupying the corners of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, had also recognized the situation’s gravity. The Navajo Nation had its first confirmed COVID-19 case on March 17, and quickly, the numbers grew, with nearly 1,200 cases a month later. By April 20, the Navajo Nation’s infection rate was ranked third in the U.S. behind New York and New Jersey.

The Navajo Reservation is vast and sparsely populated, spread across desert areas with little rainfall and few water supply systems. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde
Furthermore, the unique living conditions on Native American reservations could enable the virus to spread rapidly, putting the future of entire nations in jeopardy.

*(The virus) could wipe out those tribal nations.*
Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor of New Mexico

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, over a third of households across Indian Country are overcrowded, with multiple generations living under one roof. With the income of more than 40% of tribal families being below the federal poverty line, many homes also lack running water, indoor toilets, heat, electricity, and other services supporting sanitation, hygiene, and, ultimately, health.

On top of which, the number of people on reservations who have underlying health issues, which make them overly vulnerable if infected by COVID-19, is higher than the national average. Concurrently, public infrastructure in Indian Country is outdated, and healthcare resources are severely lacking.

Taking the Navajo Nation as an example, given its shortage of PPE, tribal hospitals – which were supposed to save lives – became places where the virus spreads. Moreover, for the population of just over 155,000 residents on the reservation, there are only 170 hospital beds, 13 ICU beds, 52 isolation rooms, and 28 ventilators, according to the Navajo Nation.

Local doctors and nurses told the media that they have to send critical patients away. The transport can be three hours by ambulance, and even by helicopter, it still takes an hour to get them to the nearest large hospital. “These are our friends and families [and] we have to send them away. There’s nothing we can do. We just have too [few] resources.”

Sending patients off the reservation also creates another issue, as many Native Americans don’t speak English, communicating in their own spoken language without written words. Ren and Arthur researched more about tribal culture and tradition. They realized there were further reasons why tribal people are afraid and unwilling to seek treatment, which may entail leaving the reservation. If their condition were to deteriorate, they might die in a strange environment, alone, a fate even more unbearable than death for the Navajo.
Hoping to help residents stay in their familiar surroundings while seeking treatment, Ren organized Tzu Chi volunteers in Phoenix to prepare for PPE distributions. However, they encountered many obstacles at first. When they contacted the Indian Health Service, the Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaska Natives, they only learned of one hospital needing PPE. And when reaching out to Flagstaff Medical Center, the largest hospital serving the nearby Navajo Reservation, no one answered the phone or returned repeated messages.

Undaunted, the volunteers decided to go online to search for tribal hospitals themselves. Using Google Maps, they located every hospital along a major roadway. Then they called each one to inquire whether it needed PPE. Next, there were other hoops to pass through, as the volunteers learned: “[Reservations have] a very complex structure of government. We [would] have to get permissions from the federal, state, county, and tribal level before they would accept any donation.”

The first tribe contacted by the Tzu Chi team was the Apache. Initially, the Whiteriver Indian Hospital, located on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona, agreed to accept a PPE donation. However, when representatives learned they would have to sign a receipt, they refused. Repeated follow-up calls were then left unanswered.

Eventually, Ren discovered that a signature could be considered a curse for Native Americans, given a troubled history of tribes tricked into unwittingly signing away ownership of their ancestral land. It was not surprising that they would exercise extreme caution when approached to sign any document.

Having understood the source of their concern, Ren became very mindful of explaining the donation receipt in detail to each organization he contacted. Some subsequently asked to have legal counsel review the document. Others simply refused to comply with the request for a signature.

There were so many challenges, but the volunteers from Tzu Chi USA’s Phoenix Service Center knew that they would be giving up on saving lives if they didn’t persevere. Finally, on April 22, having received consent from two organizations, a team of volunteers immediately set out on a journey into Indian Country, bringing an ample supply of medical masks for distribution.
First Trip

“We passed through Salt River, saw the river valley and went up the mountain to arrive at White Mountain Apache Reservation after more than three hours of driving.”

Inside the Tzu Chi van, volunteers Arthur Lai, Ren Liu, and Amy Stallman wore masks for the entire trip, and sat one per each of the three rows of seats, spaced diagonally apart to maintain a safe social distance from each other. Arthur and Ren took turns driving on what would amount to a round trip journey of 450 miles.

When they arrived at the White Mountain Apache Reservation, it was nearly noon. Few people and even fewer cars were moving about, although there was no curfew in place for that time of day. As the team delivered the supplies to a representative of the tribe, they had an opportunity to gain further insight into Native American culture.

“They spent 30 minutes looking over our donation receipt before signing it. When we asked to take a picture, Jessica Rudolfo, director of the White Mountain Apache Tribe’s Division of Health Programs, said that the instruction she received was that if we asked for a photograph, she could not accept the donation.”

However, Ren’s optimistic personality enabled him to surmount a potential obstacle by learning from it. When he sincerely inquired about the reason, Ren discovered that Native Americans believe all beings have spirits, and photographs can somehow capture it, so they don’t like being photographed. Perhaps some people might view this as superstitious, but the volunteers felt that this was just another example of what makes Native American culture unique.

The volunteers were fascinated by how tribal people respect animals, birds, fish, and every aspect of Mother Earth – the land and vegetation, waters, sky, elements, universe, and Great Spirit creator, honoring them all in ceremony, song, and story. Or, how they talk to plants before picking herbs, showing care and gratitude. In essence, indigenous peoples have lived in harmony with the world and nature for generations upon generations.

Ren hoped to create a bridge of understanding: “So I just talked to them about Tzu Chi, about Master Cheng Yen’s teachings and the story of the bamboo bank. How housewives would save a few cents after buying groceries and those little savings were what made it possible for the Tzu Chi Foundation to help people in more than 100 countries.” What happened next surprised the team.

After Jessica heard this, she asked the volunteers how to say thank you in a Buddhist manner. Then she put her palms together and bowed, relinquishing her misgivings about the taking of photos. She and Ren stood before the box containing 1,000 medical masks Tzu Chi was donating and bowed to each other with respect, and gratitude – one for the gift received, the other for the opportunity to give.

The team discovered that although Native Americans are very proud people, who don’t accept outside help easily, there are aspects of being a Tzu Chi volunteer that are also integral to their culture, which helped create a connection: “Master Cheng Yen taught us to be humble, grateful, respectful, and loving. This is very compatible with their culture.”
While delivering PPE, Tzu Chi volunteers discover that many roads on reservations are barely distinguishable, making getting to a destination challenging. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde

Along Vanishing Roads

“In 1,000 feet, keep left...” As they followed the car’s GPS instructions, they became concerned, seeing the road ahead turn to dirt, now barely distinguishable as a proper roadway. With nothing before or after to guide them, Arthur hesitated and decided to stop before the next fork. After looking over the GPS map, the team decided to follow the instructions and turn left.

They discussed among themselves as they continued along, “If the road were damaged by rain, the GPS wouldn’t show [that]. So if we can’t pass through, we’ll have to turn back to find another route.” Bolstered by this first experience of setting out into unknown and remote terrain, the volunteers quickly began to plan their next delivery of PPE to tribes in need.

On May 4, the same team of three set out from Phoenix on their second trip into Indian Country, taking them to where the infection rate was the highest. Their journey would total 14.5 hours in duration, traversing over 620 miles in Arizona, and reaching four major Indian hospitals serving the Navajo and Hopi Nations and located inside their reservations. This time, they would be delivering 6,000 medical masks.

Tzu Chi volunteers deliver 500 medical masks to Little Colorado Medical Center in Winslow, Arizona. Photo/Arthur Lai

Tzu Chi volunteers deliver PPE supplies to the Hopi Reservation, which is located within the Navajo Reservation. Photo/Ren Liu
Ren was grateful Arthur was there to take turns driving, as when one was at the wheel, the other would pay attention to the road. And, time was of the essence: “Of course we had to return the same day. For safety reasons, it wasn't possible to stay overnight.”

To shorten the travel time, Arthur planned to take a shortcut. Unexpectedly, between the Hopi Reservation and Kayenta, which is part of the Navajo Nation, the paved road completely disappeared. Ahead was an endless dirt road surrounded by desolate desert, boulders, and a few wild horses, with no other cars in sight.

As they proceeded along the valley, they had no choice but to pretend their aging minivan was a four-wheel-drive all-terrain vehicle. Holding the wheel tightly, Ren said, “I guess this kind of road exists not just in Africa, America also has it.” They would be in big trouble if the car broke down or they got lost since there was no cell phone signal.

“Drive slowly; we just drive slowly.” Three pairs of eyes focused intently on the road, each volunteer vigilant as to not taking any wrong turns. Nearly two hours later, the GPS hadn’t failed them as they arrived in Kayenta safely. The team quickly delivered the supplies and began another hour-long journey to Tuba City, the epicenter of the Navajo Nation’s COVID-19 outbreak.

The Navajo Reservation is large yet has a scarce population, with just a few convenience stores, gas stations, and grocery stores, all located in more populated residential areas. When the stay-at-home and curfew orders were issued, many people crowded the stores in Tuba City to purchase groceries and supplies, which increased the speed of COVID-19’s transmission, making this one of the most severely infected areas.

After delivering 1,000 medical masks and 500 surgical masks, the volunteers made a stop in Flagstaff to visit local Tzu Chi volunteers and give them a supply of masks for the Native American residents there. By the time the team returned to Tzu Chi’s offices in Phoenix, it was around 10:00 PM.
On May 18, two weeks after the team of volunteers returned from delivering PPE to healthcare facilities serving the Navajo Nation, CNN reported the most recent data about the spread of COVID-19 in the United States. Suddenly, the Navajo Nation was in the spotlight, with New York no longer the epicenter of infection.

As the country learned about the dire living conditions on Native American reservations, all of which contribute to the rapid spread of infection, Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized for the swiftest delivery of more PPE for the hard-hit Navajo Nation, working into the night to prepare the supplies.

Early in the morning on May 20, Tzu Chi volunteers set out on their third PPE delivery trip and traveled more than five hours to the northwest corner of the Navajo Reservation.

They would distribute 11,000 medical masks, 800 KN95 masks, 300 face shields, 150 coverall gowns, and 700 goggles that day.

Along their route, the volunteers delivered PPE supplies to the Emergency Management Department of Navajo County in Holbrook, Arizona; Navajo Health Foundation’s Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado; and Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Facility in Chinle.

In Holbrook, Catrina Jenkins, Emergency Management Coordinator for Navajo County, welcomed the team, expressing gratitude for Tzu Chi USA’s donation of PPE at this critically dangerous moment for Native American communities.

Thank you for delivering these beautiful precious supplies to us from Phoenix. We will allocate them to the local medical facilities. These masks, face shields, and coverall gowns will protect our frontline healthcare workers for a while.

Catrina Jenkins
Emergency Management Coordinator
Navajo County Emergency Management
As the volunteers arrived at Sage Memorial Hospital, they saw dozens of cars lined up in front. The facility is the first community-owned and entirely Native-managed private comprehensive healthcare system in the country. Although the exterior looked old, the hospital is trusted by the local tribes and provides care to many patients.

The administration was extremely cautious, and each person and vehicle entering the hospital was checked for COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, cough, diarrhea, or loss of taste or smell. Moving through the high-risk area, the volunteers were equally careful. After unloading seven boxes and three packages of supplies in front of the hospital building, they immediately continued their journey to the next destination.

The Tzu Chi team’s arrival was timely, indeed, as one of the volunteers confirmed: “TACC contacted us the day before requesting help for this doctor. We had already planned to deliver supplies to this hospital, so it’s just a wonderful coincidence.” Working in concert as they had throughout each donation trip, Ren handed over the PPE supplies, Arthur documented the event with photos, and Amy shared Jing Si Aphorisms from Dharma Master Cheng Yen with the hospital staff.

As the daily curfew in Chinle was about to begin, the three departed towards home, a five-hour drive ahead of them, which was of little concern at that moment. While one could say that each of these trips was arduous, as they looked out at the green pastures along the road, with the sun preparing to set, the volunteers didn’t feel the least bit tired, filled with a sense of blessing instead.

When the team arrived in Chinle, Dr. Nurit Harari, a pediatrician affiliated with Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Facility, excitedly came out to greet them. She shared that, knowing what an excellent job Taiwan was doing in fighting the pandemic, a close friend from Taiwan put her in touch with the Taiwanese American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Phoenix (TACC) about obtaining PPE. However, the TACC had already exhausted its supplies and told her about Tzu Chi’s donations.

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Braving Risks at the Lead, With Support From Behind

While the Tzu Chi road team numbered just three, it wasn’t due to a lack of volunteer interest in Phoenix. Ren explained that many wanted to participate, yet the situation in Indian Country is just too risky, “The three of us are the only volunteers whose families didn’t oppose us from delivering supplies to the Navajo Nation.” Many volunteers are also elderly, so their spouses or children wouldn’t allow them to go.

The team also took their families’ fears to heart and did their utmost to be safe. “We took care to disinfect everything, including the donation receipt. We were very careful going to restrooms and gas stations. During our third distribution, one doctor sat in our car to sign the receipt. After the doctor left, we sprayed disinfectant all over the car right away.”

After their return, the volunteers also assumed a standard operating procedure to assure not spreading the virus. They tossed trash and masks into outdoor garbage bins, then used a garden hose to wash hands and arms. Removing all clothing in the garage for laundry two days later, they then disinfected backpacks and everything in their pockets (including cell phones) with alcohol. Finally, they showered and changed into clean clothes, diligently following this entire procedure after each trip.

Meanwhile, others supported this mission to aid Native Americans hard-hit by COVID-19, in a variety of ways, some, through donations. Those volunteers who couldn’t travel became the best support team. Some went to buy numerous cases of water for the tribes. Others looked out for the road team’s needs, preparing food so the three traveling volunteers could save time and reduce avoidable personal contact.

Sharing With Love

Looking back at the mission, the volunteers also took note of the opportunities for love and care to shine forth along the way, creating touching human connections that won’t easily fade from memory.

Ren says that he’d never forget the return trip after their first distribution. When they stopped at a gas station in Winslow and were finishing their leftover sushi and rice balls, two older women saw and came over to ask for something to eat. Arthur immediately packed all the remaining sushi into a bag and gave it to them along with a big bottle of water. As the hungry ladies slowly walked away, they turned back three times to wave and called out, “Thank You!”

Kind-hearted people in Las Vegas kept donating masks to Tzu Chi. Four thousand masks the first time; 5,000 the second time. Recently they donated 6,000 masks. They trusted Tzu Chi, so we must deliver them as soon as possible.

Ren Liu
Director, Tzu Chi USA’s Phoenix Service Center

We really felt the warmth [of love and care] under the blue sky and white clouds at this gas station. We are all one family.

Ren Liu
Director, Tzu Chi USA’s Phoenix Service Center
The Journey of Care Continues

These three ventures into Indian Country by the team of Ren Liu, Arthur Lai, and Amy Stallman were not the only efforts by Tzu Chi USA to aid Native Americans since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Before the team’s first trip on April 22, volunteers had already delivered 1,500 medical masks to Flagstaff Medical Center on April 19, where the hospital’s ICU was treating mostly Navajo COVID-19 patients. On April 17, a donation of 500 medical masks had also reached the Pascua Yaqui tribe in Arizona.

Following the team’s trip on May 20, donations of PPE continued, when on June 9, a team returned to Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado, this time bringing even more PPE supplies, totaling 4,000 medical masks, 1,600 KN95 masks, 240 protective gowns, 180 goggles, and 150 face shields.

In June, Tzu Chi USA also partnered with other organizations to bolster the COVID-19 aid effort for Native American communities.

The religious group Bahá’ís of Gallup, New Mexico, has strong ties with the surrounding community and Navajo Nation, and a history of support and help for those most in need over the past 30 years. When the pandemic hit hard in the area, the group decided to act and reach out to neighbors near and far to provide relief in the form of food, cleaning products, and, most recently, PPE thanks to its collaboration with Tzu Chi USA.

"The Bahá’í faith is a worldwide religion and its major pivotal principle is the unity and oneness of humankind. It’s so natural to want to help our brothers and sisters who’ve been affected across the Navajo Nation."

Rosanne Groger-Bathke
Member and Volunteer
Bahá’ís of Gallup, New Mexico

When returning to Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado on June 9 for their second distribution, Tzu Chi volunteers donate even more PPE than before. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde

Rosanne Groger-Bathke (right) and other members of the Bahá’ís of Gallup, New Mexico, have been providing aid to Native American communities in the region for years. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde
Working together, volunteers from Tzu Chi and Bahá’ís of Gallup delivered 2,500 medical masks and 400 KN95 masks to the Navajo Nation on June 9.

“*For you guys to help us out, it’s that we really appreciate it when you help us out a lot. It makes us feel that somebody cares about us instead of just [forgetting] about us. It really touched my heart to see stuff like that, people helping the Navajo Nation.*

Sunshine Yellowhorse
Navajo Nation Resident

Such joint efforts didn’t end there, as, on June 12, Tzu Chi USA partnered with another group to bring aid to the Navajo and Hopi nations.

When Ethel Branch, the former attorney general of the Navajo Nation, noticed how hard COVID-19 had hit the region, and how unfit to answer such an emergency the area is, she decided to take matters into her own hands. She created a GoFundMe campaign – the Navajo and Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund – to seek monetary help to provide support to these communities.

“*Arizona was starting to be hit by the COVID-19 epidemic. I was shopping for myself as well as my mom who takes care of my nieces, she lives in the Navajo Nation. They don’t have running water or electricity. And so I couldn’t find a lot of things that she needed. So I decided it was worthwhile to go ahead and start the GoFundMe and by 11 o’clock that evening we’d raised $5,000.***

Ethel Branch
Founder
Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund
The fundraiser was a success, generating over $5.75 million and counting. In a short time, Ethel had created a solid structure enabling local food distributions spread across four states, covering most of the Navajo Nation, including the remote town of Piñon, Arizona, in the heart of the reservation.

Through this partnership, Tzu Chi USA provided another 2,900 medical, 400 KN95, and 50 cloth masks for Native American communities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, Tzu Chi USA’s aid efforts on behalf of Native Americans will progress as well, bringing relief and building new connections rooted in love and care that transcends all divisions.

“We’re one of the remote people. We’re overlooked all the time. They just say ‘Oh well, you know, Piñon and the rest of that community won’t notice anything.’ And this is the first, first project that is so caring. The compassion you have I think that’s what this relief project has.”

Bessie Allen
Piñon Resident and Volunteer

Piñon is in a remote part of the Navajo Nation yet the town is not forgotten during the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to the efforts of Tzu Chi and others who care. Photo/Jonathan Van Lamsweerde

Tzu Chi joins forces with the Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund to bring aid to the Navajo Nation during the pandemic.
Always, we want the spirit of Mercy (compassion) to animate our interactions with others. It’s never a matter of trying to convert anyone to Christianity, but rather to be inspired by the life of Jesus to serve and lay down our lives for others, especially the ‘least among us.’

Sister Marilyn Lacey
Founder and Executive Director, Mercy Beyond Borders
In May 2020, Sister Marilyn Lacey replied to an email from Ivy Ho, a Tzu Chi volunteer, and shared her belief that “Compassion is universal, whether expressed thru [sic] Buddha or Jesus. If they had lives [sic] in the same century, they would have been friends!”

They were communicating regarding donations of masks for personal protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Sister Marilyn’s contact with Tzu Chi USA extends back to 2019; in fact, it arose at the offices of the charity she started and is Executive Director of, Mercy Beyond Borders.

Sister Marilyn founded Mercy Beyond Borders (MBB) in 2008, after 21 years of service in the Catholic Church. The non-profit works in countries where females are marginalized, with the mission of transforming lives through forging ways for women and girls to learn, connect, and lead. MMB has initiated programs assisting women and girls in extreme poverty in Haiti, South Sudan, Malawi, and refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya.

Today, Marilyn Lacey, born and raised in San Francisco, California, is 71 and has been on a spiritual path since age 18; when she joined the Religious Sisters of Mercy in 1966, an international congregation of Catholic nuns, and vowed to commit her life to service.

At first, she taught math and theology at a Catholic high school. Then, with a Master of Social Work degree from the University of California, Berkeley, she devoted herself to the Catholic Church in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she was involved in caring for refugees arriving to the U.S. from all over the world. Her humanitarian service was honored in 2001, when she received an Unsung Heroes of Compassion award from His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Sister Marilyn learned about the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in December 2019, through Maria Chiang, a staff member at MBB. Since she was very appreciative of Maria’s abilities and attitude, she wanted to meet her parents, quoting a Persian proverb to explain her reasoning: “When you meet someone wonderful, you must thank their parents.” This aspiration led to an introduction that put Sister Marilyn in contact with Maria’s mother, Mingling Chiang, a Tzu Chi USA volunteer based in Northern California.

Soon after, in January 2020, Mingling invited Sister Marilyn to visit Tzu Chi Northwest Region’s campus in San Jose, a short distance from Santa Clara where MBB is based. In anticipation, Sister Marilyn praised that it must be a “hidden treasure” but finally could not visit at that time due to their mutually busy schedules. Then in the weeks following, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, and the global crisis absorbed everyone’s attention.

At the beginning of April, Mingling was watching Dharma Master Cheng Yen speak online, and took to heart her reminder to Tzu Chi volunteers to deliver masks to those who need them, especially nuns and priests. While they continue offering spiritual care in their communities during such difficult times, they also need protection.
Mingling didn’t delay and wrote an email to Sister Marilyn on April 5, with “Do you have masks to protect yourself?” in the subject line. In her reply, Sister Marilyn wrote, “You are too kind,” but then continued stating that “There are others who need masks more urgently: residents/staff of nursing homes; parents of young children; individuals with underlying health conditions.” If masks were available, she offered to distribute them among those in need. As for herself, she said she was using a scarf for protection.

Mingling replied saying that Master Cheng Yen had just reminded Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide to assist church personnel. Moreover, she assured the nun that the foundation was donating personal protective equipment to frontline healthcare workers and first responders. Happy to learn this, Sister Marilyn answered that if 140 masks were available, they would help Sisters in the Bay Area who live in groups that need masks. The church kitchen staff who prepare meals for elderly nuns needed protection too.

Through friends in the community, Mingling obtained and mailed the 140 masks, then requested that 200 of Tzu Chi’s blue cloth masks be sent from the Northwest Region campus to further assist in protecting the nuns in the Bay Area. At this juncture, Tzu Chi volunteer Ivy Ho entered this story, as she took charge of coordinating the donation and began communicating with Sister Marilyn to ascertain the extent of her needs.

When she learned of Tzu Chi’s additional offer of masks, Sister Marilyn was overjoyed, as she replied to Ivy: “Your kindness is exceptional! In fact, this past weekend, one of the Sisters was telling me how much they appreciated the cloth masks, because they were so much easier to wear for long hours: the elastic didn’t hurt the ears, and the cloth was well-fitting and soft and safe. Because it looks as if the U.S. will be facing a long recovery period and then likely more waves of the virus in the Fall, she wondered if more masks would be available. And then you emailed!”
In her reply, Sister Marilyn also listed other groups needing masks, if sufficient quantities were available, and requested 1,115 in total. Convinced that Sister Marilyn would get them to those in need as soon as possible, Ivy responded swiftly. Working as a team, she and her husband, Ivan Ho, also a Tzu Chi volunteer, prepared the masks for delivery with the utmost care.

First, Ivy placed two cards inside each package, one promoting vegetarianism, the other with a Jing Si Aphorism of Master Cheng Yen. Then, Ivan taped them into bundles and placed them into boxes, identifying the receiving location on the outside, so Sister Marilyn would not need to reorganize but could forward the masks without delay. The couple prepared an additional box of 200 cloth masks for kids, as well.

On May 27, Mingling Chiang, Christina Chang, Munya Chu, and Tzu Chi Northwest Region’s staff photographer, Renee Liu, pulled up in the parking lot of Sister Marilyn’s residence to deliver the donation of masks. When the nun received the boxes, once again, she called attention to a commonality between different faiths.

Sister Marilyn then invited the volunteers inside the building where she resides, which is primarily a halfway house for girls transitioning back into society after being released from juvenile detention centers. Her room is small, humble, and tidy, with just a printed copy of the vow she took when she became a nun and dedicated her life to service on the wall, and a simple wooden cross on her twin-size bed.

As she thanked the volunteers for the masks, she expressed her happiness about the blossoming connection between MBB and Tzu Chi. Concurrently, she acknowledged the broader scope of Tzu Chi’s missions, and outlined MBB’s: “Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is a global organization with multiple missions; We at Mercy Beyond Borders are a relatively small organization focused on assistance for women and girls.”

With a computer occupying most of her desk, there was little room for anything else. And so, Sister Marilyn placed documentation about MBB’s work neatly on top of her bed and explained how it is helping women and children in Haiti and Africa.

Compassion Is Our Common Goal

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While her description of its work was humble, in fact, MBB has received much recognition and numerous humanitarian awards in the United States. In 2017, Sister Marilyn won the Opus Prize for MBB’s work in Haiti and South Sudan, providing education and scholarships to women and girls, and helping them find their own identity.

When accepting the award, Sister Marilyn said: “There are many ways to measure success, calculating how many people or groups we helped, of course, is one way. But I personally feel success is the moment when I saw the light in the eyes of the 80-plus-year-old grandmother who came from the mountains into town to learn to write. The old grandmother’s lifelong dream was to be educated, to be able to write her own name before she died.” And now, she can.

After many years of service in Haiti, Sister Marilyn understands the difficulties of pushing for education and building schools there. Tzu Chi volunteers are equally familiar with the challenges of bringing aid to Haiti. Renee Liu, who often documents Tzu Chi’s disaster relief activities, shared about the foundation’s support in Haiti following the magnitude 7.0 earthquake in 2010, aid which continues until today.

When she learned that Tzu Chi helped the Catholic Sisters of Saint Anne rebuild three schools for girls in Port-au-Prince, Sister Marilyn’s eyes conveyed her deepest emotions. The three schools reopened in 2013, a year after the rebuilding project’s start in 2012, and enrolled 1,800 students. Sister Marilyn praised the project and its execution speed, sharing that MBB was also working on establishing a girls’ school in Haiti. She hopes MBB will have the opportunity to collaborate with Tzu Chi on educational projects there in the future.

Sister Marilyn then presented some of MBB’s efforts to provide educational opportunities for girls in South Sudan, where the conditions are more than ten times worse than in Haiti, with little infrastructure, and women having no social status. Although Tzu Chi’s footprints of aid have not reached South Sudan yet, Sister Marilyn hoped to collaborate on future projects benefiting those in need in that country as well.

However, she also described some of the dangers of promoting women’s education in the harsh environment of South Sudan. Several times, nuns and MBB staff were robbed on the road, their car, belongings, and even clothing looted. The culprits then left them alone and unprotected in the desolate wilderness, waiting for someone to pass by and rescue them. But despite such terrifying experiences, these courageous nuns returned to serve in South Sudan once again.

To add to causes for frustration, the families of some of the girls attending classes would come to bring them home to get married and have children. However, Sister Marilyn didn’t feel discouraged or consider giving up. Instead, she thought positively: “The seeds of education have been sown in the hearts of these girls. They will let the people around them know the importance of women’s education, and also let the next generation go to school so that more people have the opportunity to receive an education.”

Thus, we can understand why Sister Marilyn always ends her emails with these words: “When women learn, women matter. Then everything changes.”
The Joy of Serving Drives Us Forward

Sister Marilyn had shared a bit of the history of the Catholic order she belongs to in an early email to Ivy Ho:

The Sisters of Mercy are an international congregation of Catholic nuns. We were started in Ireland in 1831 and soon branched out to follow Irish immigrants to the U.S., Australia, New Zealand. The first group of Mercy Sisters arrived in San Francisco in 1854, when it was still a wild gold-rush town. The leader of the group of eight was 23 years old. The Sisters began by setting up a school and a hospital and doing outreach to the poor in the shanties and the prostitutes in the streets. Over time our work focused on teaching and nursing, but we branched out into numerous ministries as new needs (“signs of the times”) emerged, such as social justice work, being with migrants and refugees, establishing spiritual retreat centers, caring for the elderly, working with prisoners, etc. There are now Mercy Sisters in 40 countries, mostly in English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parts of the world.

And yet, the order may not easily grow, as Sister Marilyn explained:

Today, there are not so many Sisters, as our vows (lifetime commitment) of celibacy, poverty, and obedience can prove difficult in affluent societies. Our average age is high, and we do not know what the future holds. But our joy in serving continues and will, we believe, outlive us all. In some ways, we are similar to Tzu Chi.

For the Sisters of Mercy and all Tzu Chi volunteers, compassion is a driving force rooted in unconditional love. It strives to relieve suffering while uniting people of different religious beliefs, bridging social and cultural divisions, and transcending boundaries and borders. It keeps 71-year-old Sister Marilyn firmly at the helm of Mercy Beyond Borders, taking action now, and planning future service projects. In the same way, it underlies Tzu Chi volunteers’ care and efforts, which won’t cease either.

The heartwarming connection that began during the COVID-19 crisis is sure to continue blossoming, leading to more and more stories about love and care reaching those in need of help in every corner of the world, and collaborations between those of different faiths walking side by side on a joint path of service.

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BECOMING A VEGETARIAN:
EVERYONE HAS THEIR STORY

By Ida Eva Zielinska

Photo/Pexels
There are various reasons why one could decide to become a vegetarian or vegan. What might yours be?

Following the guidance and teachings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation has always advocated a meatless diet. Many Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide are vegetarian or vegan, and the foundation’s educational efforts promoting vegetarianism and veganism are ongoing.

Tzu Chi USA’s Ethical Eating Day initiative invites people to pledge to forgo meat for a day on January 11 each year, with the idea that change can start one day at a time. And, we just amplified our educational efforts, by launching the Very Veggie Movement, aiming to unify individuals around the causes of animal rights and environmental protection through shared lifestyle changes.

As of August 1, 2020, close to 1,380,000 people have pledged to participate in Ethical Eating Day in 2021, with the total number growing year by year. Why are more and more people open to exploring this new way of eating? And why do some people ultimately commit to a meat-free diet?

If you speak to vegetarians and vegans, you’ll quickly discover that they abandoned meat consumption for different reasons, which can relate to compassion for animals, environmental protection, health benefits, religious and spiritual beliefs, cultural heritage, and the list goes on. We decided to take a random sample of personal stories from people our team knows, to shed some light on the variety of motivations.

Tzu Chi USA’s Very Veggie Movement launched in 2020 and aims to spread worldwide, encouraging people to adopt a vegetarian diet.
Abhishek Dalal, a medical researcher whose family is from India, was born into a vegetarian lifestyle, as it was a part of his family’s religious heritage.

“\textit{I have been vegetarian during my entire lifetime. The reason is that my family practices Jainism, which is recognized as the austere predecessor of Buddhism. Jains advocate non-violence toward all creatures and want to minimize harm to even micro-organisms.} 
Abhishek “Abhi” Dalal 
Research Associate, Center for Healthy Communities 
University of California, Riverside School of Medicine

Actually, Abhi once tried to abandon his meatless diet but it was to no avail.

“\textit{I tried meat during my freshman year of college, and I noticed that my mind was less calm and peaceful. I also felt sluggish, and I could tell that meat was not the healthiest option for my body. I started making changes that made my body feel good. Long-story-short, since my junior year of college and for the past four years, I have now been vegan. Giving up cheese and cream was tough, but ultimately, I found that I was able to contribute the most with the energetic body and calm mind that veganism provided.} 

Having resolved to follow a plant-based diet, some waver back and forth, but for Abhi, who volunteers during Tzu Chi’s medical outreach in California, there is no turning back.

“I have a renewed appreciation for this lifestyle after briefly eating meat. I love that eating an animal-free diet has provided me a deeper sense of well-being. I find that veganism and the calm it gives me has allowed me to contribute in all areas, from attending to patient needs at Tzu Chi Mobile Clinics to challenging mental health disparities.”
Allen Freese, a translator and editor who works for Tzu Chi, found his motivation to go meat-free in the example of one of his grandparents.

I started to eat vegetarian in high school because my grandmother has been vegetarian all of my life, and she is one of my biggest inspirations. At first it was difficult to phase out meat because it is something the rest of my family made often for meals. But eventually, it became easier and they started to accommodate me by making more vegetarian dishes. Once I moved out on my own, it was much easier to maintain my vegetarian diet.

Allen Freese
Translator and Editor
Dharma as Water Team

Allen has not looked back either, sharing that his vegetarian diet not only led to some weight loss initially, but also now leaves him feeling more energized throughout the day, as compared to when he was eating meat.

Upon returning from studying abroad for a year, I noticed that I had indulged some unhealthy eating habits that had tipped me over an exceeding unhealthy weight. I once heard that in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle, 80 percent is eating and 20 percent is exercise. I began with the 20 percent and started to exercise, and that’s when one of my instructors taught me to journal my food. It was then that I began a food journal, and I learned that most of my meals were vegetarian, except on the special occasion that I was at an event with limited or no vegetarian options. I started reading articles about vegetarianism and veganism to learn more about what would be the best for me.

This is why I teeter-totter between vegan and vegetarian lifestyles.

Estela Reza
Hospital Chaplain

For Estela Reza, choosing vegetarianism was part of her journey of self-discovery. Photo/Courtesy of Estela Reza

In Estela Reza’s case, officially becoming a vegetarian was the end result of a process of self-examination that she began in the hope of attaining better health.
Once she committed, Estela, a hospital chaplain, noticed clear personal health benefits and continued to gain awareness about the broader impact of vegetarianism.

“I noticed my skin, hair and nails began to look stronger and healthier. In addition to losing weight, I was more aware of what ingredients were in my meals, [as well as] skin, hair, make-up, and house cleaning products. Looking at all the benefits that align with my lifestyle, veganism and vegetarianism contribute to less air pollution, and reduce the stress on our natural resources and environment.

Estela experiences the personal health benefits of going meat-free, and also feels better about the environmental footprint of this choice. Photo/Courtesy of Estela Reza

For Melissa Crews, who manages American Red Cross wildfire recovery programs, the environmental benefits of vegetarianism were at the root of her decision to go meat-free, a commitment she was ready to make even as a young child.

Melissa Crews stopped eating meat as a child and her decision is rooted in care for the earth and its creatures. Photo/Courtesy of Melissa Crews

“I have been vegetarian since I was around ten years old. By switching to a plant-based diet, we can alleviate the damage done to the earth like air and water pollution, the erosion of lands, waste of precious energy and animals, and deforestation. Raising and eating meat leaves behind an environmental toll that generations to come will have to manage. Vegetarianism is also far less expensive than a meat-based diet, and easier to follow if you have a busy lifestyle with work and family!

Melissa Crews
Manager
American Red Cross, CA Recovery Programs
Gimena Mazzetti, a yoga instructor, has a very active lifestyle, so the ease of following a plant-based diet that Melissa describes is a plus; however, her reasons for becoming a vegetarian, and then vegan, were philosophical and health-related.

“As a yoga instructor, we follow spiritual and philosophical principles included ‘ahimsa,’ which means no violence to all creatures – human and non-human. All creatures have a soul and should be treated with love and respect. Veganism fully aligns with these principles. From a health perspective, I have tried many different eating programs over the years. I have discovered that a vegan eating plan works very well for me, keeping all my health metrics low such as cholesterol. I feel light and never lethargic, which is very important for me as I have a very active lifestyle. I felt better, spiritually, and physically!”

Gimena Mazzetti
Yoga Instructor

Most of the people who shared their vegetarian story reported feeling better after they stopped eating meat. Raphael Podselver said, “Physically, I noticed a lot of improvement, especially in my energy level and general health. After a few weeks, I didn’t feel tired ‘digesting’ after lunch as I used to and started massively increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables I’d be eating every day.”

Raphael now works for ProVeg, an international food awareness organization that promotes replacing animal-based products with plant-based alternatives, but he once was an avid meat eater, himself.

“I grew up in Paris, France, and used to eat meat two times a day. [Then] I researched the topic of vegetarianism and animal agriculture. After reading a few articles and watching the video ‘Meet Your Meat’ on PETA’s website, I decided to cut down on meat first, while still eating fish, before becoming vegetarian and then ‘as vegan as possible’ in late 2004.”

Raphael Podselver
Political Outreach, International Policy and Public Affairs Specialist
ProVeg International
Sensitized to the suffering of animals and the negative impact of animal agriculture, Raphael gladly adheres to a vegan lifestyle. And yet, he, like many others who follow the same path, has to face resistance and contrary arguments, often very close to home.

"After becoming a vegetarian, I had to face a lot of criticism from my family and friends (vegetarianism was a very small thing in France 15 years ago). This led to some kind of struggle, repeating the same arguments and facts while not getting any serious attention.

Raphael is happy to be at the forefront of raising awareness about our food choices and the benefits of a plant-based diet. Photo/Courtesy of Raphael Podselver

The persistence of vegetarian and vegan trailblazers in raising the awareness of others does pay off, though. It caught the attention of Steven A. Simmons, a prisoner reentry navigator, and opened his mind.

"I had a few vegan friends, and the things that they were telling me about the awful lives of animals trapped in the agriculture system and the environmental cost of farming animals made a lot of sense. I felt like I needed to keep an open mind because these messages were coming to me all the time, and if I didn’t follow them, I might lose the opportunity for a very positive change in my life. I was also overweight and gaining more weight fast.

Steven A. Simmons
Prisoner Reentry Navigator"
Steven’s awareness expanded gradually, but making the change was instant once he was ready.

\[\text{One day, I had a very unhealthy breakfast of a ‘chicken fried steak’ covered in sausage gravy. I went to work after, and we took the youth we were working with to Starbucks. I ordered an iced black tea, instead of a latte or Frappuccino or something, and that was the first vegan diet choice that I made. It has been since September 2016, and I cannot ever imagine going back. I lost weight! I am still not thin because I love to eat too much, but I lost 60 lbs very quickly and have stayed the same weight since.}\]

More importantly, I have discovered new reasons to stay vegan.

It has become important to me to realize that all life is as important as my own. That I do not need to eat any animals or animal products to survive, and that by choosing to do so, I am saying that I am more important than they are. Many of the attitudes that tell us that it is okay to exploit animals are the same attitudes that drive racism and other bigotry amongst humans. To say that the differences in appearance and ability between animals and me mean that I can choose to have enjoyment based upon their suffering is something that I no longer wish to do. Not everyone in the world has the same ability to observe the vegan diet and lifestyle that I do, so it is also important that I do not judge others unfairly.

As we can see, each of these seven individuals came to their decision differently. Perhaps this diversity of motivation will open your mind to exploring: Should I, too, become a vegetarian or vegan? And if you do, you’ll have a story to share and inspire others with, as well.
King Oyster Mushrooms in Pesto Sauce

It’s easy to catch a cold when the weather varies greatly from one day to another. This nutritious dish will help keep you healthy, and mushrooms can also strengthen one’s immune system!

INGREDIENTS
- 1 pound King Trumpet mushrooms
- basil

SEASONING
- 2 tbsp garlic oil
- 1 tbsp butter
- crushed walnut
- parmesan cheese
- black pepper
- sea salt

DIRECTIONS
1. Cross-cut the mushrooms 1cm thick, and then cross-cut on the opposite side. Pan-fry the mushrooms.
2. Add the sliced basil leaf, then combine all seasonings.
3. Add butter.

TIPS
- Garlic oil: mix 1:1 chopped garlic and olive oil
Jing Si Mooncake

Jing Si Instant Mixes are made out of natural grains, are full of nutrition, and are good for your stomach. Mooncakes made from these instant mixes have a wonderfully refreshing taste, and these pastries are very simple to make, as no baking is involved.

CRUST (1 portion will make 120g)
- 60g Jing Si Multi-Grain Instant Mix
- 10g cooking oil
- 25g water or plum juice

FILLING
- 10g Jing Si Red Bean Instant Powder
- 18g Jing Si Cocoa Flavor Instant Mix 10g
- crushed walnuts
- 20g hot water

DIRECTIONS
1. Mix the ingredients for the crust (Jing Si Multi-Grain Instant Mix, cooking oil, and water) into dough.
2. Mix the ingredients for the filling: Jing Si Red Bean Instant Powder and hot water first, then add in the crushed walnuts, and separate into small mounds of dough.
3. Use a mooncake mold, and apply oil inside. Put the filling mixture created in step 2 into the crust mixture created in step 1, and place the dough into the mold. The opening should face up. Close the mold, and then remove the product.

TIPS
- The crust can be made from various flavors of Jing Si Instant Mixes. Mashed red bean or green bean can also be used as filling.
- No need to store these mooncakes in a refrigerator - it will harden the crust. Best to serve within 3-4 days.
CREATING BLESSINGS IN A PANDEMIC

“When we give rise to thoughts of kindness to help others each day, we are able to make good connections and sow the seeds of blessings.”

Master Cheng Yen’s Teachings

Translated and Compiled by the Dharma as Water Team

For several months, I have been following the news every day, and every day, the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic is alarming; it is truly worrying. Due to the pandemic, many countries around the world have closed their borders. Industries and businesses have been affected substantially, creating a direct impact on the economy. We can only imagine how this has brought even greater suffering to those already in hardship. Amid the pandemic, Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines have helped to fight the pandemic and have provided emergency aid. They have assisted people in need in several stages.

For several months, these volunteers have been carrying out aid distributions continuously. Throughout these relief efforts, several compassionate entrepreneurs, who are also philanthropists, donated a large amount of relief goods for Tzu Chi to distribute. Before these distributions, one of our volunteers in the Philippines, Mr. Alfredo Li, said to the aid recipients, “You can come and pick up the relief goods. Please bring your reusable bags. There are a lot of things, so you should bring several of them!” Thus, the aid recipients brought reusable bags of all sizes with them. The goods they received could enable a family of five or six people to live in security for over two months. The aid recipients all felt very happy, and the volunteers felt reassured that they were able to relieve the worries of those in hardship by ensuring they had enough food for the next month. Thus, those who distributed the relief products were happy, and those who received them were happy as well. As we all heard about this in Taiwan, we were even happier and rejoiced in the good work being done.

It can be said that serving others is like farming. A farmer has a fertile piece of land and knows to utilize it. He first prepares this fertile piece of land, and he knows he must sow seeds promptly. The farmer has land, he knows how to cultivate it, and he can sow seeds at the appropriate time. In the same way, when it comes to helping others, if we have the ability and it is the right time, we can give and create blessings. It is like having a field to grow crops. We have planted for the current season, and we will see seeds grow gradually in this cultivated field. One seed can produce many more seeds. In time, we will be able to harvest.

Those who can help others sow blessings and truly reap blessings. Those who give of themselves create blessings from which an infinite amount of blessings will grow. With blessings, they create even more blessings. Continuing in this way, there will be unlimited blessings.

This is like what Alfredo Li does. Before each distribution, he always tells the recipients, “You will not be in poverty forever. You need to start creating blessings now.” He encourages everyone to give by donating coins to help people in need, and he further explains that no matter how small the amount is, it can make a difference. This is just like pooling drops of water into a jug; the amount is the result of many drops coming together. In the end, many people can enjoy the water, and in this way, they form good affinities with others. This is what Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines do.

I often encourage and praise these volunteers from the Philippines and share their stories with people. By sharing our stories, we can encourage one another. When it comes to making offerings, no matter how little we give, it is still an offering. If we can treat everyone as a buddha, when we give of ourselves to help people when they are in need, then it is as if we are making offerings to the Buddha. The Buddha teaches us to serve amongst people. So, when we help others, we are following the Buddha’s teachings.

In summary, we can encourage even more people to help others. This is like sowing seeds of goodness. We must remember to be like farmers and cultivate our fields promptly. In this way, we can produce unlimited blessings.
Dharma Master Cheng Yen responds to questions from visitors, volunteers, staff, and disciples.

**At Ease in Joy and Suffering**

**Q:** A visitor asked, “Why do living beings have to suffer so much?”

**A:** Master responded, “If we are confused about life, we suffer, while if we have a clear understanding of life, we will be at ease. The Buddha said that everyone is equal and that we all have buddha nature. If we are willing to constantly improve ourselves and walk on the Bodhisattva Path, we will certainly attain buddha-hood. By learning the Buddha’s teachings and helping all living beings, we can attain a state of being at ease in both joy and suffering. In that state, there will be no suffering.”

**Eradicating Misfortune**

**Q:** “How can I eliminate misfortune and increase my good fortune?”

**A:** “It all depends on you; you are the one who can eradicate misfortune from your life and create good fortune. To truly eliminate misfortune, you must cultivate your mind—by being patient and accommodating, you can avoid conflicts and confrontations, and with gentleness and great love, you can turn misfortune into good fortune.”

**Love and Respect**

**Q:** “What is a harmonious life?”

**A:** “One in which we always show respect and love to everyone. If we do not treat others negatively, I believe they will love and respect us as well. If we all mutually respect and love one another, we can live a harmonious life.”

Excerpts from Jing Si Aphorisms, Volume 2 compiled by Jing Si Editorial Group (Jing Si Publications, 2015). For more information, please visit Jing Si Books & Cafe (directory on Pg. 64) or jingsi.shop.
Thank you daddy and mommy, for such a beautiful home
for all the food you make for me, helping me grow up

Thank you all my dear teachers, for everything that I learn
for guiding me to do what's right, helping me grow up

Thank you all my lovely friends, for sharing your life with me
We explore together this great world, as we all grow up

Thank you flowers and grass by the road, thank you for your beauty
Thank you wind and rain that we go through, giving us more courage

Thank you rivers and land, mountains and sky
Oh, thank you Mother Nature for the happiness we have every day
Many studies have shown that practicing gratitude can increase well-being and happiness. There is nothing too small to be thankful for, from waking up with a roof over our heads to having food to eat, to nature and even technology. When faced with a difficult situation, I find that by focusing on what I have to be thankful for, I can feel less anxious. And I have learned that it really is a choice in your daily life to be grateful. We can choose to notice moments when those in our circle do something to inspire us or show us they care, and we can even choose to pay that love forward and discover more gratitude. By appreciating the little things around us every day, we are not only being kind to ourselves, but to others as well.

— Martina Lo

Martina Lo is an UC San Diego Tzu Chi Collegiate Association (Tzu Ching) alumna and currently the adviser. She uses her wide range of artistic interests and experience—from personal portraits to children’s book illustrations—to support her local community and brighten the lives of her friends and family.
Teaming up with the newly formed Brigada de Esperanza NY, Tzu Chi New York hosts two grocery giveaways in the steeply COVID-19 impacted neighborhoods of Jackson Heights & Corona, Queens, on May 23 and June 27. Their primary focus is to serve immigrant populations most adversely affected by the virus’ deadly consequences, including those who cannot otherwise qualify for traditional forms of aid because of their immigration status.
Tzu Chi volunteers distribute food in Wilmington, CA, on July 11. A quarter of the families in this community are considered low-income households, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased their financial insecurity. Tzu Chi USA’s regular distributions of food, held at the Tzu Chi Community Health Center in Wilmington, are especially vital at this time, helping families put food on the table.
This summer, Tzu Chi volunteers resume their pre-pandemic food distributions at Villacorta Elementary School in California’s San Gabriel Valley. Even before COVID-19 struck, Principal George Herrera estimates that roughly 90% of students were from low-income households. With the support of Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, Food Forward LA, and volunteers from Suburban Water Systems, Family Resource Center, East Valley Community Health Center, and others, Tzu Chi USA donates 300 boxes of supplies and fresh produce on July 13.
Baldwin Park, CA

On July 17, Tzu Chi USA hosts its first food distribution at Baldwin Park High School in LA County. Roughly 95% of students come from low-income households, and the COVID-19 crisis has made matters worse for many, as Principal Gilberto Rodriguez explains: “Some students and their family were forced out of their homes when they couldn’t pay the rent. Now, more families have become homeless.” The LA County Office of Education referred the school’s assistance request to Tzu Chi USA, which later distributed 100 bags of food to students’ families.
San Bernardino, CA

Tzu Chi volunteers return to Juanita Blakely Jones Elementary School in San Bernardino, CA, on July 19, to host a food distribution. San Bernardino County is a low-income area where most residents work in blue collar jobs. On the day of distribution, residents were already lined up in their vehicles three hours before the event began. Volunteers took the initiative to promote vegetarianism as recipients waited, bringing awareness to why abandoning meat can help avert the outbreak of future animal-borne diseases such as COVID-19. A total of 319 people signed up to eat a number of vegetarian meals, their combined pledges adding up to 21,220 meals – equivalent to saving the lives of 2,165 chickens and pigs.
As Chicago enters Phase 4 of “Restore Illinois,” Tzu Chi volunteers distribute care packages of surgical masks, cloth masks, and Jing Si Rice from their Chicago Chinatown Service Center and through visits to senior apartment complexes.

As the pandemic’s case rate begins its ascent in Florida, Tzu Chi volunteers bolster Collier County’s pandemic readiness on June 18 with a donation of 4,000 surgical masks to be re-distributed across county agencies.

On June 15, staff from the pathology lab of Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville, GA, accept a PPE donation from Tzu Chi Atlanta volunteers.
To buffer food insecurity in the United States, Dharma Master Cheng Yen sends a shipment of 760 boxes of Jing Si Rice and Instant Noodles from Hualien, Taiwan. Tzu Chi Northwest Region volunteers receive the shipment in July, and locally begin donating a portion of them across Northern California. As they do so, they explain the vegetarian-friendly products’ origins and no-fuss preparation methods.
With North Carolina seeing summer surges of COVID-19, Tzu Chi Raleigh volunteers set out on a three-hour drive to High Point, NC, to deliver a donation of PPE to the High Point Medical Center on June 4.

For the first time ever, Tzu Chi Southern Region volunteers host a pair of food distributions on June 19 & 26 at their office in Dickinson, TX. With help from the Houston Food Bank, the event rallied Tzu Chi volunteers in a time of need for the Houston metro area.
In California, Tzu Chi held two healthcare service events in partnership with local government and organizations: COVID-19 and antibody testing in Milpitas and San Dimas.
In their first partnership, Tzu Chi USA’s Milpitas Service Center and the County of Santa Clara conduct free COVID-19 testing on July 2. Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, the event’s sponsor, provided nine medical professionals to administer the nasal-swab tests, while 16 Tzu Chi volunteers acted as ushers and traffic controllers. A total of 154 people were tested, helping the county gather more data for reopening considerations.
On July 26, Tzu Chi USA and Medical Task Force International partner up to provide free COVID-19 antibody testing for 100 people at Tzu Chi USA’s headquarters campus in San Dimas, California. The test resembled a finger prick, not dissimilar to blood sugar tests, and checked for IgG and IgM antibodies with same-day results. 🌸
BUDDHIST TZU CHI FOUNDATION
GLOBAL RELIEF EFFORTS

By Diana Chang, Ida Eva Zielinska

The pandemic has affected people’s lives around the globe and changed everyone’s hygiene habits. As countries lift stay-at-home orders and begin reopening in stages, Tzu Chi volunteers continue their mission to support communities and encourage vegetarianism to protect sentient beings and Mother Earth. With a mindful approach and actions, Tzu Chi is collaborating with organizations and communities to help prevent spikes in COVID-19 cases.

United Kingdom

In Manchester, England, you may spot cloth face masks from Tzu Chi at the counter in various shops, supermarkets, and post offices, free for the public to take. Our volunteers are also sourcing children’s face masks, and aim to continue providing personal protective equipment (PPE), and offering support to those in need. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi UK

Jordan

In Jordan, the lack of food supplies and restricted outdoor activities during the pandemic made people panic. Tzu Chi Jordan volunteers are extending a helping hand to relieve the stress of communities. Knowing that many residents are currently jobless and lack funds to buy essential supplies for their family, volunteers paid for the purchase of 7,000 flatbreads to help those in need. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Jordan

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe’s acute water shortage is a result of a severe and extended drought, a symptom of climate change. As COVID-19 continues to spread and confirmed cases surge, the residents in Zaka District 15, Masvingo Province, have no clean water source. In response, Tzu Chi funded drilling a well to meet the community’s water needs and help halt the continuous spread of the virus. On July 19, Tzu Chi volunteer Chintsai Chu (front left) and community leaders initiate the new well at an opening ceremony. Photo/Hlengisile Jiyane
Many students in Tay Ninh Province, Vietnam, face dropping out due to the impact of COVID-19 on their families, with their parents’ wages reduced or jobs lost. On July 18, Tzu Chi Vietnam volunteers hold a distribution to help communities in that province. In total, 566 students from low-income families receive cash aid to alleviate some of their parents’ financial burden. Photo/Tianliang Van

In Guatemala, on July 30, Tzu Chi volunteers donate PPE to a temporary hospital set up in Industry Park by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Services. They provide 9,600 medical masks, 4,320 N95 masks, 1,820 isolation suits, and 450 protective suits that day. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Guatemala

On July 27, Tzu Chi Argentina prepares 40 bags of food and blankets to donate to families in need. Maria Marta, the person in charge at a family support center in one community, helps care for children from 35 neighboring households. Since due to the stay-at-home order, Tzu Chi volunteers can’t deliver the supplies, Maria picks them up at Tzu Chi’s office so the families won’t run short of food and essentials. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Argentina

On July 18, Tzu Chi Bolivia volunteers deliver medical supplies and care to help combat COVID-19 in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the largest city in Bolivia. Angelica Sosa, the interim mayor, and several authorities accept the supplies, which include: 100,000 gloves, 50,400 surgical masks, 1,000 goggles, 504 biosecurity medical outfits, 480 biosecurity suits, and ten respirators. This bulk donation is of great support to the entire community of Santa Cruz. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Bolivia
Chile

Tzu Chi Chile obtained medical supplies through the National Health Service System (CENABAST), aiming to help protect frontline healthcare workers. On July 24, Tzu Chi Chile volunteers deliver supplies to Dr. Roberto Del Río Children’s Hospital, donating: 50,000 procedure gloves, 40,000 medical masks, 7,000 N95 masks, 5,000 shoe covers, 5,000 protective caps, 3,900 isolation gowns, 1,800 units of protective clothing, and 288 protective glasses. Tzu Chi volunteers and representatives from the hospital and CENABAST pose for a group photo during the donation ceremony. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Chile

Malaysia

Everyone is taking preventive actions during the pandemic, and Tzu Chi volunteers seize every opportunity to alleviate the shortage of medical supplies in the countries where they serve. In Malaysia, after the reopening announcement, as schools begin preparations for the resumption of classes, Tzu Chi volunteers provide thermometers to Rifle Range Junior High School in Padang Tembak. Photo/courtesy of Tzu Chi Malaysia

Australia

With the spread of COVID-19, Tzu Chi volunteers from the Gold Coast Office in Australia promote a plant-based diet and prepare vegetarian lunch boxes for the Mater Foundation, in the hope of encouraging those who are not yet vegetarian to abandon the consumption of meat. Employees at Mater Foundation receive the vegetarian lunch boxes with smiles and pose for a group photo with Tzu Chi volunteers. Photo/Yutung Lin

Given the number of people traveling, COVID-19 spread to Western Australia by the end of March and remained out of control in April. At that time, there was also a severe shortage of PPE at medical institutions across Australia. In response, Tzu Chi’s Perth office mobilizes volunteers to make cloth masks. They also make face shields upon request from rural medical institutions. When the second wave of community infection hits Melbourne, causing another shortage of PPE, the Melbourne office asks volunteers in Perth to make 500 face shields for donation to medical institutions that urgently need PPE. Brother Sirong Tu (front left) and others carefully make the shields, fastening the elastic bands. Photo/Shuchen Che
Canada

With the spread of COVID-19, Canada also faces a shortage of PPE. Tzu Chi Canada donates 6,000 masks to the Ending Violence Association of BC, which helps abused individuals respond to unfair treatment such as violence or sexual assault, by providing assistance, support, and protection. While donating the masks, volunteer Chanyun Tung (left) presents a Tzu Chi Monthly journal to Executive Director Tracy Porteous (right) to share more about Tzu Chi's missions. Photo/Chunfang Wu

Singapore

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Singapore government implemented “circuit breaker” from April 7 to June 1, encouraging people to wear masks to protect themselves and others. And, the demand for face coverings increased dramatically as the pandemic surged. For this reason, Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre initiates a campaign to make cloth mask sets and distribute them to those in need free of charge, hoping to reduce the use of medical masks by the general public, leaving them for frontline healthcare workers. During the weeks that Circuit Breaker is in effect, 391 volunteers make nearly 55,000 cloth masks. On June 14, they then connect online through a “Thread of Love” meeting, and share their mask-making experiences and joy about helping out during the pandemic. Photo/Pao Tung Pan

Thailand

Thailand is especially hard-hit by COVID-19, which causes many difficulties in people’s lives. Tzu Chi Thailand mobilizes to provide supplies to its care recipients and vulnerable populations who haven’t received government subsidies for three consecutive months due to the pandemic. On July 4, Tzu Chi Bangkok provides a third distribution in Nong Chok, extending a helping hand to residents in need. Parents and their children join Tzu Chi volunteers in distributing the supplies to residents with love and blessings. Photo/Pinti Su

Indonesia

During the COVID-19 crisis, many remote villages in Indonesia have still not received aid or essential supplies. For this reason, Tzu Chi Indonesia volunteers cooperate with local police departments to sort out which villagers require assistance. On July 10, Tzu Chi volunteers prepare 1,000 boxes of essential supplies and deliver them to Sukabumi, Jawa Barat, hoping to reduce the pandemic’s burden on villagers’ lives. Volunteers and the police also make a delivery to Cikole and hand out 100 boxes of supplies to those in need. Photo/Anand Yahya
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Who We Are:

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is a volunteer-based international non-governmental organization, established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, Taiwan, in 1966. From 30 housewives saving 50 NT cents (approx. 2 US cents) from their grocery budget every day to help the less fortunate, Tzu Chi has now brought humanitarian aid to 102 countries and regions. The Foundation is dedicated to providing community and social services, national and international disaster relief, medical and charitable aid, education, environmental protection, and a bone marrow donor registry while promoting humanistic values and community volunteerism.

Tzu Chi USA, the first overseas chapter of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, was established in Alhambra, CA in 1989. It all began when Stephen Huang, a wealthy American businessman seeking personal guidance, visited Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Taiwan. Meeting this gentle nun, who had created a powerful organization, and was able to realize one seemingly impossible dream after another, solely for the benefit of others, changed his life. Filled with awe and admiration, Huang became a disciple and vowed to bring the spirit and mission of Tzu Chi to the United States, which he did by establishing Tzu Chi USA.

Tzu Chi USA began by mobilizing volunteers, then hosting “tea parties” where they could share their thoughts, experiences, and joy of volunteering. The events drew supporters and quickly inspired the creation of additional chapters. Today, Tzu Chi USA has 66 offices and facilities throughout the U.S., with volunteers and donors working tirelessly to make a difference in their communities. This is just the beginning of our journey, serving others unconditionally and sowing seeds of love and kindness in the Americas.
Tzu Chi volunteers introduce nutritious and tasty Jing Si Instant Rice during a food distribution event. Photo/Hector Muniente