

COMPASSION & RELIEF

TZU CHI USA JOURNAL

A Platform of Compassion

Nourishment and Compassion After the Santa Rosa Fires

A Spirit of Love After Hurricane Harvey

A Commitment to Serve





CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM

thoughts for meditation, contemplation, and reflection

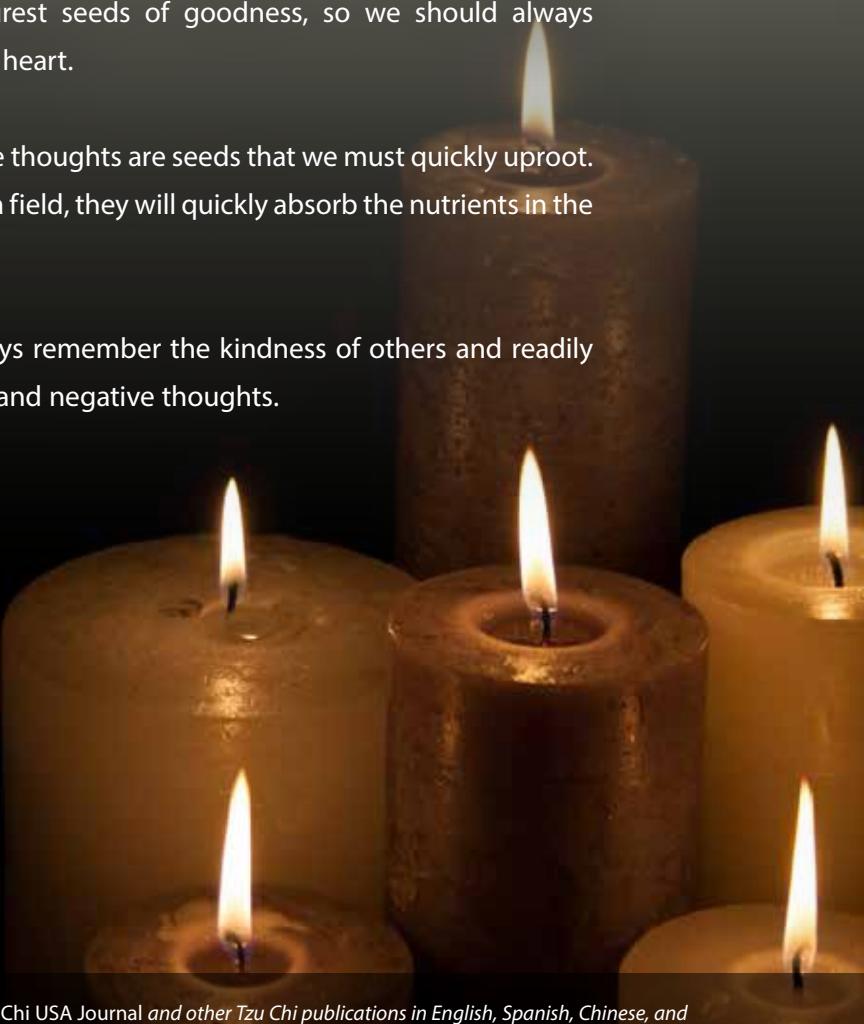
Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Founder of Tzu Chi Foundation

Keeping a Heart of Gratitude

Gratitude brings the purest seeds of goodness, so we should always cultivate gratitude in our heart.

Resentment and negative thoughts are seeds that we must quickly uproot. Otherwise, like weeds in a field, they will quickly absorb the nutrients in the field of our heart.

Therefore, we must always remember the kindness of others and readily eliminate all resentment and negative thoughts.



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TZU CHI'S BAMBOO BANK SPIRIT

GOOD THOUGHTS
GOOD DEEDS
GOOD HABITS

When Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi in 1966, she fashioned coin banks from bamboo and asked her lay followers—thirty housewives—to save NT\$0.50 (about US\$0.02) from their grocery money every day to help the poor.

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

From these humble beginnings fifty years ago, Tzu Chi has grown into a global NGO with ten million volunteers and donors in over fifty countries. The bamboo bank collects not only donations but also kind thoughts.



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Tzu Chi volunteers provide material aid during a relief distribution after Hurricane Harvey.

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"A field of blessings awaits cultivation by all benevolent people in the world"

In her teachings, Master Cheng Yen often emphasizes that the heart is like a field to be cultivated. Each thought we have, each word we speak, and each action we take is a seed. If we sow good seeds through good thoughts, good words, and good actions, in time, we will be able to harvest the fruits of blessings.

In this issue of Tzu Chi USA Journal, we will meet people who work to plant good seeds in their own hearts and spread good seeds in their communities. We will read about the people of San Bernardino who participate in the Mobile Food Pantry distributions every month, the people of Houston who helped each other in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, and the people of Santa Rosa and Oakland who bravely leaped into action when wildfires burned across Northern California. These examples, and many more, highlight the work of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

The Sutra of Infinite Meanings states: "Each seed can produce hundreds, thousands, millions of seeds." With just one seed, a tree can grow to produce countless fruit. We hope that the articles in this issue of Tzu Chi USA Journal will inspire you to join us, and that together, we can cultivate the fields of blessings. 

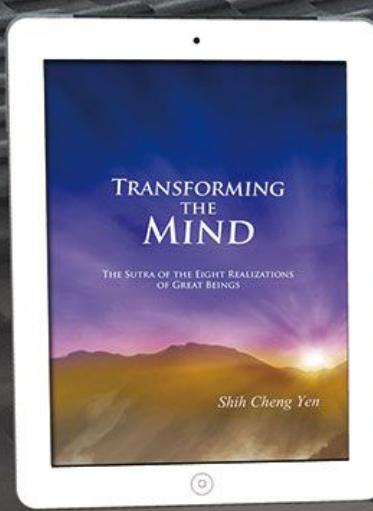
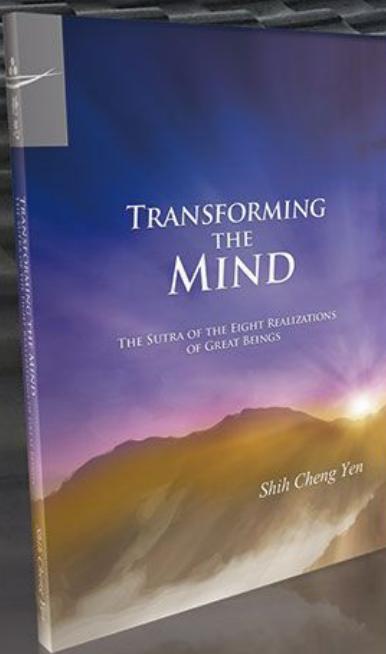
Devin Makizuru

Editor-in-Chief

TRANSFORMING THE MIND

THE SUTRA OF THE EIGHT REALIZATIONS OF GREAT BEINGS

The Sutra of the Eight Realizations of Great Beings contains the fundamental practices allowing us to make the most of our potential as human beings. In her explanation of the text, Dharma Master Cheng Yen uses stories from the Buddha's time and our days to relate these teachings to modern life. In this way, she lays out a path for how to grow in compassion and wisdom by going among people to help those in suffering.



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Tzu Chi began as a faith-based charity organization in Taiwan, and over the past 51 years, we have left a wonderful legacy there. Now, Tzu Chi is active in the United States, and we need to think about how we can carry those same influential values of Tzu Chi from Taiwan to the United States and other countries. How can we bring even more awareness of Tzu Chi to the global stage? How can we deliver the Dharma to even more people? My aspiration is to share Tzu Chi's principles and values by helping others around the world.

Recently, we have seen many disasters, not just in the United States, but across the globe. These disasters have not only increased in frequency, they have also increased in scale. There are many challenges in the world around us, yet in disaster after disaster, Tzu Chi volunteers are there to provide relief. Our volunteers are both dedicated and compassionate; they are people with kind hearts who can always be relied on. With their consistency and stability, we are able to continue moving forward in bringing relief to those experiencing hardship.

Within Tzu Chi, there are many experienced people diligently working every day to do good. Throughout the course of our work, we have witnessed frequent changes occur around us, and in our current time, these changes can occur in an instant. Yet in the midst of these unexpected conditions, there are always new opportunities that open up. For example, in the course of their relief work after Hurricane

Harvey, Tzu Chi volunteers have formed close ties with the local Vietnamese community in Houston. In each community we visit, we make new and lasting connections with the people there.

In addition to disaster relief work, we have worked on an organizational level to share our values with others. For example, this past year, we have promoted 111, Ethical Eating Day, in the United Nations to encourage healthy eating habits. Initiatives like these will result in better personal health and reduced harm to the earth. With efforts like these, who knows how much we will accomplish over time?

When I reflect on my own recent volunteer experiences, I think about how Master Cheng Yen describes Bodhisattvas. Any person with the desire to help others can be a Bodhisattva, and Master's teachings are all about bringing the practices of the Bodhisattva into our daily lives. Tzu Chi volunteers are truly Bodhisattvas, and I believe that as long as we continue to take action together to help others without expecting anything in return, we can truly have a tremendous influence in bringing positive changes to the United States and the world. 





Advancing Diligently with Gratitude, Respect, and Love

On the second Sunday in May each year, Tzu Chi volunteers around the world celebrate the three-in-one celebration of Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Tzu Chi Day. Last year (2017) around May 14, over 535 ceremonies were held in over 40 countries, with nearly 300,000 participants.

On these auspicious and joyful occasions, we encourage everyone to express gratitude for the Buddha's teachings, which nourish our wisdom, guide us to the right principles, and lead us in the right direction. We also express our gratitude for our parents for the grace they have shown in raising us. It is said that filial piety is the foremost of all good deeds, and being filial is itself an act of goodness. Only when everyone practices filial piety and good deeds will our world be in order and our society be in harmony. Moreover, as it is the contributions of people from all walks of life that enable every one of us to live lives of such abundance, we must also be grateful to all living beings in the world.

In April 2016, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Ecuador in South America. Tzu Chi volunteers carried out a Cash for Relief program and also began reconstructing a Catholic church in Canoa which was the spiritual heart of the community. People of different faiths respected each other and offered each other sincere praise. In April 2017, the country was hit again by torrential rains and over 120,000 people were affected. Tzu Chi volunteers from seven countries

in the Americas, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Brazil, Guatemala, the United States, and Canada, once again dedicated themselves to the disaster relief efforts.

The sincere dedication of these volunteers started a cycle of love and now these seeds of goodness have already sprouted. New and old volunteers worked together with love, guiding everyone to uncover their intrinsic nature of goodness. On May 3, 2017, with the assistance of the priest of Ecuador's Santa Ana Church, over 1,000 flood-affected residents were joined by volunteers from all over the world who had taken part in the relief efforts. Together they harmoniously and successfully completed their own Buddha-bathing ceremony in a beautiful atmosphere.

Tzu Chi volunteers everywhere walk the Bodhisattva-path by putting the principles of gratitude, respect, and love into practice. Truly, Bodhisattvas are not idols we worship on an altar, but real people; they arise in response to suffering sentient beings. As long as we are willing to take action to relieve the suffering of sentient beings, every one of us can be a Living Bodhisattva.

With a sincerity that comes from the bottom of our hearts, we will not fear any hardship as we come together to help others. If, on the other hand, we take issue over every small thing and are arrogant and attached to our point of view, we will be full of afflictions and will be unable to inspire people to work together. So, when we



Excerpts from Dharma Master Cheng Yen's lectures on May 1-18, 2017

On the Bodhisattva Path

are facing a treacherous environment, how can we protect our spiritual aspirations and avoid retreating? We must earnestly cultivate a mindset of peace and joy, and uphold the practices for bringing peace and joy through our actions, speech, thoughts, and vows.

The practice of bringing peace and joy through our actions means we must purify our own mind and distance ourselves from all evils. We must avoid treacherous conditions and must not allow ourselves to be affected or obstructed by slander or negative actions. We should also remind ourselves to be vigilant and cautious in our speech and actions and continue to advance diligently. The practice of bringing peace and joy through our speech means to make good use of our time and speak only words that benefit others. When we speak hastily, without proper consideration, we may hurt both others and ourselves. Every word we say should encourage people to do good deeds and guide people in the right direction.

The practice of bringing peace and joy through our thoughts means that only when we are sincere, positive, and steadfastly grounded can we earn the trust of others. Flattery, deception, and jealousy will hinder our wisdom and compassion. We must always take the Dharma into our hearts and understand impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. After we help others, our minds must not have any attachments. Then we will be at ease and at peace.

The practice of bringing peace and joy through our vows means we must make the Four Great Vows to deliver all sentient beings, to eliminate endless afflictions, to learn infinite Dharma-doors and to attain unsurpassed Buddhahood. When we pave this Bodhisattva-path so that it is broad, smooth, and long, we can experience the scenery along this path. Then we will be able to comprehend the Buddha's wisdom.

As we walk the road of spiritual practice, with a tranquil state of mind and sense of joy and willingness, we can guide people to take the Dharma into their hearts and avoid being polluted by constant disturbances. Not only will we walk this path ourselves, we also hope that all sentient beings can walk the Bodhisattva-Path together with us to attain peace and joy. To help all sentient beings live in peace and stability, be free from suffering, and attain happiness is the intention of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Our society needs gratitude, respect, and love. We should keep the same sense of reverence we have as we participate in the Buddha-bathing ceremony, so that we can at all times express gratitude, respect, and love toward each other. By gathering together the power of love, people's minds can be in harmony and the world can be at peace. This is what it means for all sentient beings to be truly blessed.

Everyone, please always be mindful! 



Susan (far left) introduces the volunteer training team to intern trainees.



A Seed of Determination

Edith Chen

Every achievement grows out of the seed of determination.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

Although Susan Su may not be the first one to stand out during events, her smile can capture your attention right away. When you interact with Susan, whether you speak Chinese or English, she can quickly adapt and make you feel comfortable, like you are part of her family.

If you ever get the chance to work with Susan, something else stands out: Susan's determination. Never one to back down from anything, Susan will try her best when taking on new projects and trying new things. In fact, Susan actively seeks new opportunities to help others and develop herself. She will enthusiastically pursue opportunities to learn and practice new skills. Whether it is leading training sessions for new volunteers, or participating in study groups or volunteer activities, Susan combines the warmth of her personality with her strong determination to help others.

Susan's warmth, determination, and ease may seem effortless now, but like most things in life, the qualities that are immediately apparent to others are exactly those that take the most time, energy, and focus to cultivate. In Tzu Chi, Susan was inspired help as many people in her community as possible, and her journey provided her with life-changing opportunities to develop her unique inner strengths.

The Determination to Help

Susan can trace her journey back to her senior year in college. As part of her nursing program, Susan served in a senior center. Initially excited to help others, she soon found that there was a cultural difference between the residents and herself, which made it difficult for her to relate to some of the residents. Susan became frustrated from not being able to do much for the residents beyond



offering professional care. She was unable to chat with them and find out more about them.

This situation became an early test of determination.

Susan was persistent in finding ways to help others beyond just providing medical care. She soon found a group of Chinese senior residents who were isolated, and she quickly started to interact with them. As Susan got to know them better, she wanted to keep doing more. "I started to wonder how to help them. I offered nutrition counseling and provided health education. In the end, I felt pretty happy that I could do a lot."

Once she found a group of residents with backgrounds similar to her own, suddenly, the thing that made it difficult for her to connect with others turned into an asset. Having found her niche, Susan began to dedicate herself to helping the Chinese community. The connections she made would later lead her to Tzu Chi, and with her nursing background, she would become a dedicated volunteer, focusing on Tzu Chi's medical mission. In time, Tzu Chi would lead Susan to interact with people from many different backgrounds, and Susan would develop a sense of joy and ease with everyone she encountered.

Supporting Leukemia Patients

As Susan continued to serve as a Tzu Chi volunteer, she began to work with the bone marrow registry and became a coordinator, taking care of potential donors as well as bone marrow recipients.

Susan remembers one particularly stressful case. A cancer patient had found a match with a Tzu Chi volunteer in Hualien. At that moment, Susan felt proud to have found someone who was a match for a patient who really needed it.



As a registered nurse, Susan has been helping with the bone marrow drive since 1995, taking blood samples from potential donors. These samples are used for HLA-typing.

Through the process of receiving the bone marrow and speaking with the patient, Susan was able to obtain permission for Tzu Chi to provide the patient with spiritual care. However, Susan began to experience difficulties in providing that care. One night, she received a phone call from the patient who asked why his platelet counts were always so low and why he had to receive platelet donations. At this moment, Susan felt very nervous. She didn't know what to say or do. She didn't know how to respond.

The patient's body seemed to be rejecting the transplanted marrow; furthermore, the patient seemed to be aware of what was happening and needed support. The conversation occupied Susan's mind every day, and she wasn't sure how to ease the patient's worries. She was even more unsure of what to do because the patient called her instead of the doctor. However, Susan realized that she needed to bring the issue to attention of people who would be able to provide help.

Susan made up her mind and went to meet the doctor at 7:00 PM the following day. When she arrived at the hospital, she was so nervous and worried that she couldn't even find the floor the patient was on.

Susan eventually found her way to the patient's doctor. As she met with the doctor and told him the story, she was still very uneasy since she didn't know how the doctor would react. To her relief, the doctor smiled and thanked her for bringing up this issue to him. Even though Susan didn't know what to do at first, she found the courage to tell the doctor what was going on and was able to see the issue resolved.

Susan made sure the patient's concerns were addressed, and she never gave up in supporting the patient. Eventually, the patient did get better. Even when she wasn't able to help others directly,

Susan was determined to find a way to make sure people were taken care of.

Training Others

After years of working in the medical mission as a Tzu Chi volunteer, Susan was asked to train new volunteers as part of the certification training team with Vict Ying. When Vict moved to Taiwan, Susan became the lead of certification training at her local office. At first, Susan did not know how to approach the training, and she soon encountered an even greater challenge in recruiting and engaging new volunteers. Just as it had been when Susan began serving in the senior center years before, the issue of language and cultural differences came up as a difficulty that Susan had to face.

Back then, Susan had redirected her focus on the Chinese community, and in doing so, found a way to help others as she had hoped to do. This time, however, Susan wanted to do more. She knew that she needed to reach out to everyone, regardless of their cultural background. Susan wanted to recruit both Chinese- and English-speaking volunteers to join Tzu Chi. She remarked, “Everyone is different, so the ways we use to help people are different as well. We need to assist each person as an individual. I would connect with each new trainee individually. I would have deep talks to encourage and help them solve their issues, whether the issues were

with their jobs or families. I really treasure when volunteers trust me to provide different types of assistance to them to complete the program and succeed.” Susan would always follow up with all the trainees and ask for feedback as a way to improve the classes and gauge interest. She hoped that with these various kinds of support, the trainees would be able to remain determined not only in their training, but in their sense of mission and desire to help more people in the community.

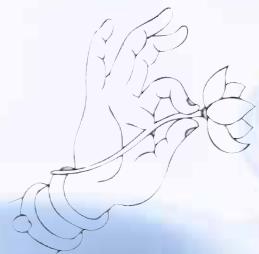
As Susan grew in her determination, her qualities of warmth and ease around others have developed as well. From her life experiences interacting with people, Susan has learned how to take care of others. This is the reason why people are drawn to her smile, and why they feel so at ease around her.

The Jing Si aphorism, “Every achievement grows out of the seed of determination,” is still something that Susan applies to her life and her work. As Susan continues to improve herself, her aspirations to help others have become greater and greater. Continually serving others, Susan is now training new Tzu Chi volunteers, instilling the same determination she has cultivated through a lifetime of practice. 

Edith Chen recently graduated from Hofstra University with a Master's Degree. Edith is currently a Tzu Ching Alumni and serves as an advisor for the Tzu Shao group in Long Island.



Susan with Mr. Zhang, the first leukemia patient in the Northeast Region to receive bone marrow from the Tzu Chi Bone Marrow Registry.



Teaching 「 SPIRITUAL PRACTICE 」 through Cooking

Yang Lee

It is through learning from the trials of everyday life and human affairs that wisdom is attained.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

The first time I heard about Niki Wu was when I was invited to a cooking class at the Tzu Chi Long Island Branch Office in New York. Although I wasn't able to attend, I heard nothing but positive feedback from all who attended. Niki possesses a talent for food presentation. In photographs, the dishes look like art pieces that would fit in a museum. When people told me that the Tzu Chi New York office had arranged another cooking class with her on November 18, I knew I had to sign up. The class was not just an ordinary cooking class with great food, but an event that was designed to share lifelong wisdom and Dharma-joy.

The class I attended had fifteen participants and was hosted in the Tzu Chi office in Flushing, New York. Niki brought six assistants with her, not just to help with preparation, but also to make sure all attendees had a chance to taste the food and become familiar with the ingredients. She had prepared a full meal, including soup, main

course, and dessert. Niki opened the class by introducing her team, and then played a video clip of a documentary on the relationship between processed food and health issues. The number one thing she wanted us to take home was the "whole food" concept. This concept closely relates to her personal story.

Niki's cooking journey started at age thirteen. She was born as the eldest child in a large traditional Chinese family. Her mother believed that it was important for a girl to master cooking, so Niki had to help her mother in the kitchen. For a long time, she did not enjoy cooking; it felt like a burden forced upon her, but she could not find any way out of it.

Niki's attitude toward cooking changed when she found out her son had a serious allergy to some unknown element in the air. Although she went to many specialists, none of them could tell her what triggered her son's allergic reactions. When



Niki (third from left) and her team at the cooking class on Nov 18, 2017.
Photo credit: Yang Lee

he played outdoors, or when room temperatures became too high, he would suffer rashes all over his body. Every time he got a skin rash, Niki had to use special medication to stop the itch. Niki needed to get this medicine every other month. It was a struggle for everyone in the family, both physically and emotionally. Nobody knew how to cure it or make it less painful.

One day, a doctor suggested for Niki to change her son's diet to see if it had any positive effect on his condition. The doctor introduced her to the "whole food" concept. Niki came to embrace this concept and change the way she prepared food. Five months after they switched diet, her son's condition started to improve. He could start enjoying outdoor activities without worrying as much about getting an allergic reaction. She didn't have to apply much medication and her

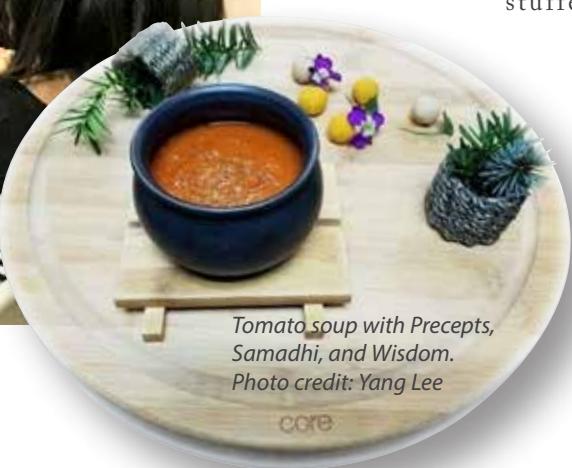
visits to the doctor's office became less frequent. By the second year, she did not have to bring her son to the specialist anymore. The doctor was also amazed at the results.

Niki teaches that when we carefully consider the food we eat, we will see positive effects. From the cooking class, I could see how much thought Niki put into her cooking through the courses she prepared. The first course was tomato soup. Niki used three different kinds of tomatoes for her recipe. The reason behind the variety is that each tomato has different nutritional values. Niki reminded us that in order for vegetarians to stay healthy, they must always have a variety of foods in their diet. This is one of the ways Niki wants us to think about our food; she wants us to understand each ingredient's nutritional value and how each ingredient benefits our bodies.



Niki also pointed out that using three types of tomatoes is like including three blessings. In this dish, she wanted to give blessings of gratitude, respect, and love. When she cooks, Niki often uses sets of three.

As we let the soup cook on the stove, we moved on to prepare our main course, stuffed



mushrooms.

Niki used portabella mushrooms as the base, with rice and a variety of vegetables for stuffing. She supplemented the dish with a side of baked potatoes. During her class, Niki explained that she only uses seasonal ingredients, not only because it follows the wisdom of our ancestors, it is also an act to show gratitude, respect, and love to the Earth. She also learns and experiences Dharma through practicing mindfulness when she cooks. This echoes the concept that “walking, standing, sitting, and lying down can all be forms of meditation.”

It was about seven years ago when Niki realized how to apply the Dharma to her cooking. She was inspired by Tzu Chi’s musical adaptation of the Samadhi Water Repentance as well as the Sutra of Infinite Meanings. This time, her spiritual journey was triggered by her daughter. Niki’s daughter was not a fan of vegetables, and she especially disliked okra. It was like a battle every time she tried to get her daughter to eat some okra. Then one day, she read in the Sutra of Infinite Meanings that “one gives rise to infinity.” She said, “Master Cheng Yen always tells us that each one of us is a seed.” Inspired by this concept, Niki taught her daughter to plant okra seeds in the backyard and how to take care of them. The okra grew so well that her daughter, with a sense of accomplishment, shared photos of her okra plant on Facebook. She loved the smell of her freshly grown okra, and from that day on, okra became her favorite vegetable. This taught Niki how easy it was to apply Dharma into our lives. She also realized there was a big gap between food and her cooking. She once told me, “Because of my daughter’s story, I learned that we can learn a great deal from our food. This is Dharma.” From that point on, Niki always thinks about how to apply the Dharma in her actions.

As she found ways to improve her son’s condition and teach her daughter how to appreciate the things around her, Niki learned about the Dharma and the spirit of Tzu Chi. She recalled that she had made a vow early on to follow Master Cheng Yen mindfully life after life, but only then did she understand why Master Cheng Yen always tells us to be mindful. “Master Cheng Yen meant that we should capture every moment in our heart. No matter how short the moment is, we need to safeguard it.” It is through this practice that we can accumulate wisdom. We should always be mindful. With mindfulness, we can connect with each other.



Chia Seed Pudding that showcase the concept of whole food and seasonal ingredients
Photo credit: Yang Lee

The last item to be prepared in the cooking class was the dessert, which was chia seed pudding. It was a very easy dish to make, and it also makes for a very good breakfast. Niki told us that she normally prepares this dish before bed because chia seeds need to be soaked in the beverage of one's choice for at least thirty minutes. She also talked about how the art of cooking is about learning to utilize the time we have and plan ahead as much as possible.

Once all the food was prepared came the moment everyone had been waiting for: the presentation. Niki brought out the dishes and various tools to help with the demonstration. She brought out a large wooden cutting board as a foundation for the soup presentation and used a small bowl that looked like a pot for soup. Then she put three small vegetable balls on the side. Niki explained to us that each element serves a purpose and that she adapts her explanations when she presents to different audiences. For example, to Tzu Chi volunteers, the element of three can be seen as Precepts, Samadhi, and Wisdom. In this way, the dish reminds us that we must always continue to walk on the right

path and take good care of our hearts. When she presents this dish to others, she explains the idea of three as gratitude, respect, and love. She asks these people to always keep these three concepts in mind as a way to cultivate blessings and happiness.

Starting from her love for her family, Niki has inspired countless people to improve their health and well-being, while at the same time strengthening their connection with nature and other people. She is truly an example of what is described in the Sutra of Infinite Meanings, how a single seed can grow to a large tree which gives rise to hundreds and thousands of new seeds. Through her wisdom and her understanding of the Dharma, she cultivates not only vegetables in her backyard, but fields of blessings in many people's hearts. 

Yang Lee is a New York-based Faith Corp member. Presently, his aspirations in Tzu Chi are to expand Tzu Chi International Medical Association's New York Dental Assistant program, to reach out to more people in need, and to guide people to realize their blessings through witnessing others' suffering.



Plentiful Blessings from a Single Seed

Katie Lin

Those who sow the seeds of blessings shall harvest plentiful blessings.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

Nancy and Robert Ku stood in Pui Sham Wong's room at UC Davis Hospital. It had been three weeks since they had started their visits to Wong, a kidney patient who had been recovering from a recent transplant. While Wong was recovering from his life-saving operation, Nancy, Robert, and local volunteer team supported him and his family at the hospital. The day Wong was discharged from the hospital lives on in Nancy and Roberts' memory as one of their happiest memories from their work in Tzu Chi. "We treated each other like family," says Nancy. "When he was ready to be discharged, I was so happy." Nancy and Robert had even brought a cake and sang "Happy Birthday" to celebrate Wong's "rebirth." With Nancy and Roberts' care, Wong and his wife have gone on to become Tzu Chi Volunteers themselves. They spread Master's teachings by sharing his story, telling everyone about how Tzu Chi volunteers took care of him in his time of need.

Experiences like this one show how Nancy and Robert have worked to diligently cultivate their field of blessings and have planted the seeds for others to do so as well. In the course of their hard work, the seeds they've sown have blossomed into a vibrant community of people from all walks of life who have been inspired to help others. Nancy and Robert continually sow and harvest these blessings every day.

The Sowing of the Seed

A field of blessings all begins with a single seed. Nancy's intention to join Tzu Chi was born out of her love for her community; she wanted to find a way to give back. As she was looking for ways to do so, her husband, Robert, discovered Da Ai TV. As they started to watch Da Ai dramas, they began to learn about Tzu Chi. Touched by the lessons behind the dramas, they were deeply



Sister Nancy and Brother Robert and the UC Davis Tzu Ching.



Sister Nancy and Brother Robert - Sacramento Caring Case Discharged

inspired by Master Cheng Yen's teachings.

When Nancy's friend invited the couple to attend a Da Ai Charity Concert in 2005, the couple suddenly had an opportunity open up to them. Soon after the concert, Nancy and Robert became Tzu Chi volunteers. They took the first steps of their life-changing journey by helping to document local Tzu Chi events in Sacramento. Tzu Chi's Northern California 3-in-1 team had just been established at that time, and there was a high demand for volunteers to help document Tzu Chi's history. "There was only one person responsible for doing all the photography for the Tzu Chi Sacramento events," explained Robert. "When the director of the Tzu Chi Sacramento office asked us if we could help take some pictures for the events we were attending, we happily agreed to do so."

The Sprouting of the Seed

Over time, the couple's intention to give to their community grew into a strong commitment. In addition to doing photography, they also learned how to film videos and conduct interviews. The workload was huge. On average, the couple spent four to five hours commuting between Sacramento and the Bay Area. At night, they spent many sleepless hours editing videos and transcribing interviews to tell the stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Even though they had to commute long distances and often worked late into the night to be part of the 3-in-1 team, it was stories like Pui Sham Wong's that kept them going.

Nancy and Roberts' initial intention to give back to their community eventually grew into a full-time mission. The more they participated in Tzu Chi activities, the more they took Master's

teachings to heart. The couple even made a decision to retire early and become full-time Tzu Chi volunteers. Rather than taking more time for themselves, they became busier than ever before.

From a Seed to Plentiful Blessings

As the Northern California 3-in-1 team began to develop, Nancy and Robert dedicated themselves to volunteering with the Tzu Ching (Tzu Chi's Collegiate Association). Starting from the year of 2010, each week, Nancy and Robert travel at least two hours back and forth from their home to the UC Davis campus to attend Tzu Ching gatherings. They work to provide leadership development to support Tzu Ching as the Tzu Ching learn to organize and implement their own activities. When Nancy and Robert first began their work for the UC Davis Tzu Ching, there were only six members. Now, the UC Davis Tzu Ching is a well-structured group with over 30 active members.

Much to Nancy's surprise, during their work with the Tzu Ching, Nancy was able to cultivate blessings not just within the organization, but within her own life as well. When Nancy's daughter was still in school, the two argued quite a lot. In each case, it was always Nancy's judgements and expectations that caused her to initiate these conflicts. The bitter memories Nancy has of crying after each argument still live vividly in her memory. One day, when Nancy was feeling upset after an argument, Master's words suddenly came into her mind: "We have to treat our own children with the heart of a Bodhisattva." As her tears flowed, Nancy began to wonder why she didn't practice this compassion toward her own daughter. Ever since then, Nancy has thought about how she can treat everyone in her life with a Bodhisattva's compassion and how she can continually improve her relationships with others. During her time with the Tzu Ching, Nancy also learned how to be more understanding of youth

She learned how to listen to their opinions, love them as her own children, and accept them for who they are.

"Mom, I think you changed," Nancy remembers her daughter saying to her. Now, rather than criticizing her daughter and setting expectations of what she wants from her, Nancy can understand and respect her daughter's opinions and decisions. In the seeds that she sowed with the Tzu Ching, Nancy has harvested the blessing of becoming a better parent herself.

Beginning from the initial seed of their love for their community, Nancy and Robert have cultivated plentiful blessings not just in the lives of others, but in their own lives as well. Knowing that "Today's youth is tomorrow's future," Nancy and Robert continue to give to their community through their work with Tzu Ching, Tzu Shao (youth group), and Tzu Yo (children's group). In this way, they hope to inspire more seeds of love to sprout so that future generations can continue to harvest plentiful blessings for years to come.



Katie Lin is a teacher and Tzu Chi volunteer from San Francisco. She graduated from UC Davis with a major in Human Development and a minor in Chinese.



Sister Nancy and her daughter.

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A Platform of Compassion

Southern California's Hope for the Future

Eric Horng

When the unfortunate cannot find help, those who are blessed must go to them.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

On a cold Sunday evening in November of 2015, a burglary took place at Graciano Gomez Elementary School in San Bernardino, California. In a city that is consistently ranked as one of California's most dangerous cities, this crime was unfortunate, but sadly not uncommon. However, as school officials and community members searched for information on who was responsible and why the burglary occurred, everyone would soon see that the circumstances of this burglary were anything but ordinary.

The 2015 school burglary in San Bernadino would become the driving force behind a major program developed by Tzu Chi in Southern California. On November 20, 2015, at a medical outreach event hosted by Tzu Chi at Graciano Gomez Elementary School, the school's principal approached Michael Tsai and Andrew Lin and told them about the recent break-in. Shocked, Michael and Andrew asked if anything valuable was taken. The principal told them it wasn't money; it wasn't report cards or electronics either, but something unexpected: food. Security footage revealed that the cafeteria was broken into, and officials had managed to identify the perpetrators. They were students.

Tzu Chi's San Bernardino volunteer team was at a loss for words; their hearts sunk down in their chests. What could have caused such young children to commit such a serious crime? Inside, they knew the answer. San Bernardino is one of the country's poorest cities. Having declared

bankruptcy in 2012, and with a third of the population living below the federal poverty line, they knew the students must have been desperate to fill their stomachs and had decided it was better to steal than to starve.

At first, the team didn't know what they could do to help, but something had to be done, and soon. From the medical outreaches in the community that Tzu Chi had hosted over the previous two decades, volunteers had seen the effects of poor nutrition on individuals and families. Just as Master Cheng Yen first realized the link between illness and poverty, the volunteers understood that poverty leads to an improper diet, which leads to illnesses and health issues. These health issues in turn beget even more poverty and suffering. Determined to break the cycle, Michael, Andrew, and the rest of the volunteer team began thinking of things to do.

The team soon realized that they needed to do something different. There were already many food banks and pantries spread throughout the San Bernardino area, yet there were still so many families who were suffering. In addition, the products given out at those establishments were mostly canned and not very nutritious. Knowing that access to proper nutrition meant the difference between good health and chronic illness, the team made a vow to the community and Master Cheng Yen, promising to provide healthy food: food that they themselves would be "willing to put on the dinner table." Not only

would they provide high quality food, they would provide familiar foods that the local people would enjoy and be comfortable eating. But how could they develop an effective system to connect the people in the community to healthy, high-quality food?

The answer had its roots in the early days of Taiwanese produce markets. Over 40 years ago in the countryside of Taiwan, produce sellers would ride bicycles and carry their goods from village to village, selling fresh fruit and vegetables. The idea that they didn't need a fixed location, but could deliver food from community to community, stuck. In true Tzu Chi spirit, the team decided that instead of having the community come to them to get help, they could go out to the community to bring food to those who needed it.

Once the idea took hold, the program developed rapidly. Tapping into the power of the close connections Tzu Chi had made over 22 years of service in San Bernardino, the volunteers were able to create a snowball effect of compassion. Everyone who heard about the program and the story of the school cafeteria break-in immediately wanted to help. Gary Liao, the owner of Lucky Farms, promised to sell produce at wholesale price and donate the purchase amount back to Tzu Chi. The owner of Max Group, friend and ex-industry competitor to Andrew, promised free Mexican food staples. Tzu Lin Baiyun, owner of Asia Supermarket, promised their highest quality produce at wholesale price, and Farmland Imports, an organic produce importer, promised free fresh fruit. Dr. Tom Rivera, a longtime community leader in San Bernardino, worked with the local government and nutritionists to ensure program viability and ensured that the distributed food would be suitable and healthy. Tzu Chi volunteers donated their trucks to be converted into food trucks and learned how to drive them. The team was struck at how many people were willing to help them bring this program to life. As Andrew remarked, "If we make great vows to benefit others, Dharma Protectors will appear to help us."



By August 2016, the planning for the Mobile Food Pantry was complete. However, the team understood that this was only half the battle. To succeed and make a lasting impact in the long-term, the full support of the community was needed. The team held community meetings involving religious and community leaders across San Bernardino County to spread the word and invite them to join the movement. They wanted to involve the people of the community so that the local people could learn to support their own neighbors while cultivating their compassion.

From the initial community meetings, five school districts approached Tzu Chi asking if volunteers could provide support in their



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Andrew Lin teams up with a fellow volunteer to unload one of the Mobile Food Pantry trucks. Tzu Chi's mobile food pantries have allowed Tzu Chi to turn any location into a distribution site.

communities. A few short months later, the first official distribution took place at Indian Springs High School on November 20, 2016, exactly one year from the day that Graciano Gomez Elementary School's principal came to Tzu Chi with the news of the school cafeteria break-in. Over 350 people attended the distribution and received food bags with staples like rice, beans, bread, and fresh produce, along with clothing and Christmas ornaments.

As of October 2017, over 60 distributions have been held, resulting in 270,000 pounds of food given out across 10 locations. Over 9,000 families in Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County have received food.

With every distribution, the commitment and connection grows stronger between volunteers and the communities they serve. When the volunteers go into the schools, the people waiting in line wave happily at them and even joke with them, asking where their coffee and donuts are. But as Tzu Chi volunteers get closer with those in the community, they see that the problems go beyond the need for food. The principals and other school officials at the school distribution sites often express that students have behavioral issues and trouble with academics.

But where most would see problems, Tzu Chi volunteers see opportunities. The students who have behavioral and academic issues due



Staples such as flour, rice, and oil stand alongside bags of fresh produce, ready for distribution.

to lack of attention and care give the education team opportunities to serve as role models to teach them about gratitude and filial piety. The difficulties students have with medical or vision problems give the medical team the opportunity to help them by applying their skills.

As the distributions increase in frequency, Andrew, Michael, and the volunteer team's vision is coming to life in more ways than they thought possible. Through the Mobile Food Pantry program, they wanted to provide a way to distribute food to those in need. In the process of implementing the program, they have created a platform for talented and compassionate people to come together and pool their resources to benefit the community. This platform has brought together so many different people; from food suppliers who donate their best products, to volunteers with Down syndrome who help

package and distribute food despite their own challenges, to supporters who selflessly donate time and money to help others, to recipients who put aside their personal pride to accept the help they need to better their lives. Now that a foundation has been set, even more people will be able to contribute, providing medical services, education services, and more. The Mobile Food Pantry is part of a complete initiative that can truly change the lives of the people of the community for good.

As a practitioner with strong faith in Master Cheng Yen's teachings, Andrew is committed to applying the principles of the Dharma to the Mobile Food Pantry program. He sees this program as a vehicle for volunteers to inspire their own compassion and connect to those who are suffering. In his words, "We cannot hope to become Bodhisattvas by merely chanting sutras



Mobile Food Pantry distributions are always packed.



or listening to the teachings. In order to pass on the teachings to others, we need to relieve their suffering and make good connections with them. This is the method we are using to help volunteers and recipients alike realize that they have compassion within themselves to give to the world.”

Having recently attended a distribution for the first time, I was able to see the Mobile Food Pantry program in action. I could see the friendliness of the local volunteers and school officials, the gratitude of the community members who came to us for help, and the dedication of the Tzu Chi volunteers young and old, some of whom had traveled up to several hours to attend.

As we wrapped up the distribution, Andrew spoke. “It’s been one year since we first began these distributions. Do you want to continue

volunteering?” Before I could open my mouth to respond, a resounding “Yes!” echoed through the school auditorium. At that moment, I truly understood the dedication and energy of the volunteers as I felt my heart fill with hope for the future. 

Eric Horng is a recent alumnus of the Tzu Ching chapter at the University of California, San Diego. He has been involved with Tzu Chi for over 18 years. Eric is currently volunteering for Tzu Chi USA's Dharma as Water team to develop curriculum for leadership conferences and retreats.

Food for the Pantry

How Gary Liao and Lucky Farms Changed the Mobile Food Pantry Project

Kevin Lee

Know your blessings, cherish them and sow more blessings.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

In 2016, as the idea of the Mobile Food Pantry Program was being conceived, Michael and Andrew ran into a pressing dilemma: How would they be able to provide food to the recipients in need?

From the start, it was apparent that Tzu Chi's mobile food pantry program would differ from other food banks and food distributions; it had to. In applying the principles of the Dharma to the program, from loving the Earth, to practicing mindfulness, to extending compassion to all beings, suddenly options for finding distributors of food became more and more limited. The Tzu Chi volunteer team had a small and set budget, and food that could be bought at that price point was not at all healthy. Andrew recalls, "When we looked at the inventory from distributors, it was mostly canned goods, energy bars, juice, soda, and cereals." Did Tzu Chi really want to distribute cheap but unhealthy foods? At its deepest level,

providing food for the food pantry was an issue of integrity. With its material limitations, how could Tzu Chi find a way to operate on the same scale as other charity organizations, while still being in accord with its own values? Michael and Andrew vowed to Master and to the community that they would provide the best quality food to those in need, but they had to figure out a way.

The team found the solution in Gary Liao.

If you ask Gary, he would tell you that he is "just" a supporter of Tzu Chi and a supporter of the Mobile Food Pantry program. But of course, this is vastly understating his role. Gary has been critical as a supplier of produce for the Mobile Food Pantry. With Gary's involvement in this program, at any given distribution, alongside staples and basic necessities such as oil, flour, and rice, you will see a variety of gleaming fruits and vegetables: apples, oranges, tomatoes, avocados, corn, bell peppers, and more. As the second generation owner of Lucky Farms, Gary has been one of the primary providers of fresh, healthy produce for families in need.

The produce that can be seen at a distribution, which is grown on Gary Liao's Lucky Farms, only tells one side of the story. While Gary will tell others about how he provides produce for the Mobile Food Pantry, what he won't tell you is that he provides his services completely unconditionally. He sells his produce at wholesale prices, and after receiving payment from Tzu Chi, he donates the money back to the foundation. He donates everything back, every single time.

Supplying the freshest and highest quality produce has been a key focus of the Mobile Food Pantry program.



Gary's actions lie in his spirit of compassion. The story of the school break-in that occurred on November 20, 2015 shocked Gary, and he agreed to work with Michael and Andrew to find a way to support others in need. Even before the Mobile Food Pantry program, Gary had participated in Tzu Chi medical services in the area. He has joined Tzu Chi volunteers in serving others for over 25 years. Outside of his work in Tzu Chi, Gary has also supported immigrants by providing them with jobs on Lucky Farms. Like the other leaders in the Mobile Food Pantry program, Gary is passionate about giving back to his community.

With his experiences participating in Tzu Chi and community events, and his strong sense of commitment in helping others, it is no wonder that Gary maintains a strong relationship with other key people in the Mobile Food Pantry program. Gary is quick to praise Michael and Andrew for their hard work in starting the Mobile Food Pantry. He says, "Michael and Andrew are doing a really superb job in making things happen. They are very proactive and they persevere through all challenges." Gary also maintains a close relationship with community leader and longtime supporter of the Mobile Food Pantry, Dr. Tom Rivera, praising him as "the catalyst for coordinating local community groups to become involved." Despite claiming that he is just offering support and is doing very little, Gary has always been one of the key people involved in the Mobile Food Pantry.

As someone who has been there from the beginning, Gary has seen the development of the



Gary Liao leans close to listen to the request of a community member.

Mobile Food Pantry and all the challenges that Michael, Andrew, and others had to overcome. He recalls, "During one event, the announcement wasn't sent out. There were ten people or less who showed up...everyone was really depressed." Despite the extensive planning by Michael and Andrew, "The first event was chaos." Yet everyone learned from experience. Merely six months after the start of the program, the process and operations were smooth, streamlined, and efficient. Over one year later, the Food Pantry is going strong, with regular distributions taking place every month.



Gary Liao's Lucky Farms has been crucial in supplying healthy and fresh produce for the Mobile Food Pantry program.

This all comes back to Gary, who provides the produce that keeps the program running. Gary remarks, "Participating in this program is a great opportunity. I consider it an honor to be involved. We now have many community groups with members who are donating and participating in these events. As the program grows, more and more people will become involved."

Michael, Andrew, and Tzu Chi volunteers set the foundation for the Mobile Food Pantry to achieve success, but it is also due to the efforts of community members such as Gary Liao that allow this program to continue to serve the community. In the most recent distribution, over 300 people were served in the span of 70 minutes. Andrew remarked, "I never am short on supplies. I am never short on inventory. I always have enough to help others." Andrew and Michael know that in their efforts, Gary Liao is someone

who can always be relied on. He will always be there to ensure that the produce is taken care of. Gary is a Dharma Protector whose offering of food sustains those with the commitment to relieve suffering and walk the Bodhisattva Path.



Kevin Lee is an alumnus of the Tzu Ching chapter at the University of California, Davis. He has been involved with Tzu Chi for over 17 years. Kevin is currently one of the advisers for the Midwest LA Tzu Shao group, and is also involved in volunteer activities with the San Dimas Tzu Ching.



▲ On November 18, Tzu Chi Heart Lotus Life Program volunteers in Honolulu, Hawaii visited residents at Palolo Chinese Home. Heart Lotus Life program volunteers visit residents every week to provide emotional and spiritual support. (Photo by Mark Ladao)

Tzu Chi USA invited the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe for a performance tour in the United States. On October 1, the Troupe and Tzu Chi USA Headquarters Region jointly held a charity concert, titled "Thousands of Helping Hands: Cultivating Harmony" in hopes of gathering good thoughts and spreading the power of great love to raise funds for doing charity work. Tzu Chi hoped that the "Thousands of Helping Hands" performances would inspire everyone to extend their hands to help the needy. Tzu Chi volunteers used bells and drums to perform the musical adaption of "Ode to Diligence" to display the spirit of promoting and spreading the Buddha-Dharma. (Photo by Wesley Tsai)





From November 17 to 19, Tzu Chi Medical Foundation USA and Care Harbor jointly sponsored a large-scale free medical clinic service for low-income residents and those without medical insurance. The free clinic provided medical services ranging from Western medicine, Chinese medicine, dental services, and ophthalmology. In addition to treating people's illnesses, Tzu Chi volunteers also cared for people's hearts. Through partnership and teamwork, Tzu Chi USA continuously spread great love and medical care. (Photo by Lily Chang)



Over a month after Hurricane Harvey, Tzu Chi volunteers continued to provide care to disaster survivors. After taking shelter in Dallas, most of the evacuees had returned to their homes after the hurricane, but some still remained in Dallas, staying in temporary apartments provided by the Dallas city government. On October 4, 2017, Tzu Chi volunteers in Dallas visited evacuees and distributed cash cards and eco-friendly blankets to those living in the apartments.

Here, Li Huimin (left), Wu Meihua (center), and Ling Yuanliang (right), visit a resident.
(Photo by Shirley Wu)



Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas on August 25. The heavy rainfall lasted several days and caused severe flooding and damage. On November 11, Tzu Chi USA held a distribution at the Jing Si Hall at its branch office in Houston, Texas to benefit the flood survivors from three Vietnamese temples in the greater Houston area, as well as others who called for assistance. Some Vietnamese flood survivors put on the Tzu Chi volunteer vest and joined the ranks of Tzu Chi volunteers to help other affected residents.

(Source: Tzu Chi USA Southern Region)

Tzu Chi USA in Action



◀ On November 19, Tzu Chi youth volunteers from East Los Angeles participated in a food distribution provided by the Mobile Food Pantry program. Tzu Chi's mobile food pantry provides fresh, healthy produce to those in the San Bernardino community.

(Photo by Patricia Greene)

Summer rainfall caused severe flooding and tremendous damage in the Midwest United States. Milwaukee, Wisconsin also suffered from the floods. On August 20, the American Red Cross assisted Tzu Chi USA Midwest Region to hold a distribution at Riverview Elementary School located in Silver Lake, Wisconsin. Tzu Chi distributed cash cards and eco-friendly blankets to flood survivors. Tzu Chi volunteers also introduced Tzu Chi's bamboo banks to local residents.

(Photo by Chen Zhengxuan)



Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas on August 25. The heavy rainfall lasted several days, causing severe flooding and damage. Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, became inundated with water, and many residents lost their homes. On November 18, Tzu Chi volunteers went to Rockport to hold their third distribution. They distributed cash cards and eco-friendly blankets to the survivors from Rockport, where Hurricane Harvey made landfall, in hopes of supporting and inspiring them along the path to recovery. This was the final distribution for the emergency relief phase of the Hurricane Harvey disaster relief effort.

(Source: Tzu Chi USA Southern Region)

*On November 18, 2017, Tzu Chi volunteers participated in a food distribution in the Alice Griffith community in San Francisco, California. Volunteers hold distributions every week.
(Photo provided by Roxanne Buchwitz)*



▲ On October 8, devastating wildfires started in Santa Rosa in Northern California. Tzu Chi volunteers went to the support center in Santa Rosa and Napa Valley to accompany those affected and offered their sincere love and care. Starting on October 14, Tzu Chi volunteers came to this devastated area every day.
(Photo by Jiang Guoan)



▲ On November 19, Tzu Chi USA volunteers in New York City held the very first free medical clinic service at the Tzu Chi Brooklyn Service Center. The clinic provided consultation, diagnosis, and treatment from more than ten different Western and Chinese Medicine departments. Since many new immigrants who live in Brooklyn are new to the area and lack medical insurance, Tzu Chi volunteers apply their medical skills to take care of their bodies and minds.
(Photo by Peter Chu)



A Catalyst for Change

A Community Leader's Experience's on the Mobile Food Pantry

Cory Sylliaasen

Life is most fulfilling when we are able to do our best to help others at every moment.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

How Tzu Chi can thrive in local communities?

This was one of the key questions I have often thought about as a Tzu Chi volunteer in Southern California.

The Mobile Food Pantry program is a relatively new program for Tzu Chi. However, in just over a year, it has already actively engaged members of the San Bernadino community, and the program is still growing. At every distribution, one can see a mix of both certified Tzu Chi volunteers and community volunteers who diligently share the same vision and work for the same goals: to relieve suffering and to bring joy to others.

The high level of engagement in the local community is not an accident or byproduct of the Mobile Food Pantry program. It is a key part of the plan developed by Michael, Andrew, the Tzu Chi volunteer team, and community leaders who shared the same dream to provide the best service they could in San Bernadino.

Shortly after the break-in at Graciano Gomez Elementary School, the Tzu Chi volunteer team began contacting professionals from various backgrounds to assist in planning and developing the new Mobile Food Pantry program. For Tom Rivera, a community leader in San Bernadino, this program was a new and exciting opportunity, and he immediately stepped forward to help.



Dr. Tom and his wife Lily pose for the camera shortly before a distribution event.

Early Experiences

Tom Rivera, locally known as “Dr. Tom,” has devoted his life to giving back to his community. Tom has been an active leader, serving on various boards and community organizations throughout the years. Despite his retirement, he continues to participate in community events even today. He is a bit frailer in body than he used to be. He has used a wheelchair for years. However, Tom’s strength of spirit has never wavered. When Tom is asked what keeps him going, he replies: “I’ve been very fortunate to have a lot of good people helping me; they are the ones who inspire me and help me succeed.”

It is clear that out of all the services Tom is a part of, he has always had a deep affinity for

the field of education. Tom began his primary education in South Colton (a county of San Bernardino) before being accepted to California State University Los Angeles, graduating with a M.A. and finishing his education with a Ph.D. from the University of California Los Angeles in 1973. After graduating, Tom was accepted to volunteer as an educator in the Peace Corps and travelled throughout Central and South America.

During the time Tom was working in South America, he met Lily, his wife of now 53 years. As they both continued their work, Tom developed a strong motivation to help build communities. He felt this sense of responsibility wherever he served. These values have motivated him and have led to his life's work in San Bernadino.

When Tom returned to San Bernadino to work as a teacher, he witnessed firsthand much of the hardships people in the community experienced. Tom was deeply troubled by the dropout rates of students in San Bernadino's schools. In 1985, Tom, along with other local educators and volunteers, founded the Inland Empire Future Leaders Program. The program conducts training conferences on public

speaking, community involvement, and college preparedness. According to statistics of the students who participate, 90% go on to attend college while most graduate in the top 15% of their senior class. Tom Rivera is quite proud of the program's success and takes great joy in knowing that 100% of the staff are volunteers. This sense of volunteerism is very important to Tom, and he shares the same volunteer spirit in his work with Tzu Chi.

Work in Tzu Chi

Tom and his wife Lily began regularly volunteering with Tzu Chi's free medical clinic over 24 years ago. Along with his work in the field of education, Tzu Chi gave Tom an opportunity to participate in providing medical services to the community as well. Tom strongly believes in the necessity of the clinic; it is critical to many of the residents who do not have access to health services due to the high rent and few jobs in the area.

Tzu Chi's medical outreach events have provided dental and medical services for over 14,000 people over the 26 years Tom has participated in them. In his work with Tzu Chi, he has witnessed the genuine kindness and love with which Tzu Chi volunteers perform their duties, and he how these actions enrich the hearts of others. Among the many organizations Tom has been a part of, Tzu Chi stands out simply due to the sincerity of its volunteers. Tom remarked, "They offer



Dr. Tom has spent his lifetime serving his community of San Bernadino. He is the bridge that connects Tzu Chi and the local community.

help with no strings attached. Volunteers do what they can to develop a healthy community that will thrive. The services they provide to the community provide a better outlook on life. There is no expectation for anything in return.”

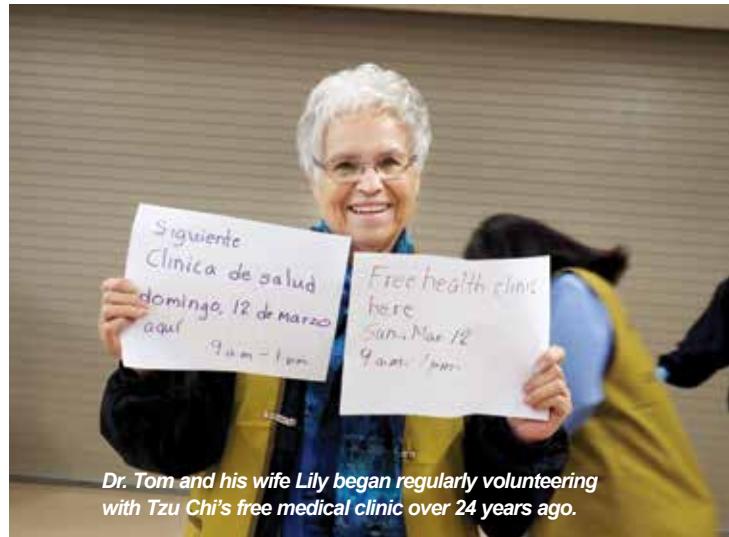
The positive energy from the volunteers and the love they give to recipients have kept Tom coming back time after time. In 2016, Tom suddenly had a new opportunity to help. Planning for a new program was underway, and Tzu Chi’s Mobile Food Pantry would soon begin.

A New Opportunity

After several months of planning, making contacts and ironing out the details, the first distributions for the Mobile Food Pantry program began.

Tom remembers this time well. Collaborating with Michael, Andrew, and the Tzu Chi volunteer team, Tom reached out to those he had worked with for many years. He was crucial in connecting Andrew, Michael, and Tzu Chi volunteers to schools, community boards, professionals, and residents across San Bernardino. Getting input, feedback, and support from a wide range of groups helped to embed the Mobile Food Pantry program in the hearts and minds of many people, establishing it as something very special. Tom himself offered guidance and support. “We needed to ensure, as with any program, that we did not leave anything out. The plan was to provide the best service in the community; this is what Tzu Chi did.”

With every distribution he attends, Tom is happy to see the enthusiasm of the volunteers. He recalls several heartwarming moments during the distributions: “We sing to people if it is their birthday. During Christmas, we sing ‘Feliz Navidad.’ During the distribution, people come up to us. They hug us and thank us. There is such a strong feeling of gratitude.”



Dr. Tom and his wife Lily began regularly volunteering with Tzu Chi's free medical clinic over 24 years ago.

Looking back, Tom remarks, “We need everyone to step up to the plate and provide services that allow for equal opportunities to everyone. We need to do as much as we can.”

Tzu Chi’s Mobile Food Pantry has quickly become deeply rooted in the local community. Tzu Chi volunteers and community volunteers work side by side to serve residents in need, and with every distribution, the connections between all those involved in the program become stronger and stronger. Driving this effort is Tom. Tom is a person who leads, connects, and serves as a bridge between Tzu Chi volunteers and the people of San Bernardino. In his efforts, Tom represents the kind of people who will bring Tzu Chi’s efforts into the mainstream. He is truly a catalyst for change, and with people like Tom, Tzu Chi will thrive as part of the community. 

Cory Sylliaasen is a senior industrial design student and Tzu Ching at California State University Long Beach. He has been an active Tzu Chi member and volunteer since 2016. Cory spends most of his time working either on his internship or on school programs, using his spare time to volunteer.

Opportunities for Blessings

As we aid others, we are in fact also sowing blessings for ourselves.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

Among the Buddha's disciples, Mahakasyapa was known for engaging in strict ascetic practice. Since the Buddha taught that suffering is caused by our desires, Mahakasyapa's lifestyle was completely based on eliminating his desires, and he would avoid any kind of comfort. For example, Mahakasyapa preferred to sleep outdoors, especially in cemeteries. He took cast-off rags he found on the ground as his clothing, and when asking for alms, he would go exclusively to the poorest people.

One day, Mahakasyapa encountered a poor, old, and ill woman. She had no house to live in and would huddle next to others' homes outside their kitchens. When those inside would pour out used cooking oil or dirty rice water, she would use a broken bowl to catch whatever she could. Whatever she was unable to catch, she scooped off the ground. She consumed the dirty rice water and the used cooking oil she was able to obtain in order to stay alive.

When Mahakasyapa saw this old woman, he felt empathy for her. He walked toward her and asked, "Would you be willing to give me some of the rice water you captured today?"

When the old woman saw Mahakasyapa, she was filled with reverence. She replied, "I am a poor and lowly person. The water I have was used by others to wash rice, and I scooped it off the ground, so it is even more unclean. How can I offer this to you, Venerable One?" Mahakasyapa said, "I am happy to receive whatever you have in your broken bowl. Although you say it is unclean, to me, this rice water is very precious." He held his alms bowl close to hers, and the old woman poured the rice water from her bowl into his. When Mahakasyapa received it, he gave her his blessings. Then he took the bowl of rancid water and drank it all in front of her. The old woman was overjoyed that Mahakasyapa had accepted her offering.

With deep reverence, the old woman knelt in front of Mahakasyapa. "Thank you for giving me this opportunity to make an offering." At that moment, her frail body took its last breath. The old woman passed away and was immediately reborn in heaven. In heaven, she was filled with gratitude. "What blessings have I earned to be born in heaven? I remember making an offering to Venerable Mahakasyapa. I have been born here because of the blessings I received

Dharma Master Cheng Yen



Storytelling by the Master

from making that offering. I must repay him for accepting my offering." So, she went to where Mahakasyapa was sitting in meditation and scattered celestial flowers upon him to express her gratitude and reverence.

Because Mahakasyapa asked for alms from the poor, he was able to give the poor opportunities to create blessings for themselves. However, Mahakasyapa was so focused on this method of practice that he only went to the poor to ask for alms, never to anyone else. Because of this, Mahakasyapa's actions were sometimes questioned by others in the Sangha. Once, Mahakasyapa had a disagreement with Subhuti, another one of the Buddha's closest disciples. Subhuti wanted to provide the people with opportunities to create blessings for themselves, but he focused only on giving these opportunities to the wealthy because he felt the wealthy needed those opportunities the most.

When Subhuti asked Mahakasyapa, "Why do you only go to the poor to ask for alms?" Mahakasyapa reproached Subhuti and asked, "Why do you ask for alms only from the wealthy? Are you going to the rich just

to satisfy your cravings for taste?" Subhuti countered, "The impoverished already have so little, yet you still ask them to share their food!" As the two of them engaged in this debate, the Buddha was passing by and overheard them. The other disciples asked the Buddha, "Who is right? Who is wrong?"

The Buddha called Mahakasyapa and Subhuti. He told them both, "We must go wherever our conditions take us. The purpose of our lifestyle is to provide opportunities for others to create blessings."

In saying this, the Buddha advised both Mahakasyapa and Subhuti against going to only one specific group of people. Just as Subhuti went only to the wealthy, Mahakasyapa went only to the poor. The Buddha particularly admired Mahakasyapa for his determination in his spiritual practice, but he also advised Mahakasyapa against limiting the opportunities he gave to others. In Tzu Chi, Master Cheng Yen encourages us to "help the poor and educate the rich." While we should strive to cultivate Mahakasyapa's quality of determination, we should also follow the Buddha's advice: whether rich or poor, we should give everyone the opportunity to create blessings. 



With You by My Side

Music and Lyrics (Chinese): Patrick Chou

Translation: Dharma as Water Team, Tzu Chi USA

*While we each come from a different place
And we all are used to different ways
Now the gap between us is erased
For there is a common dream we chase*

*With you by my side
Giving me a smile to brighten up my days
With you by my side
When I'm sad you give me such a warm embrace
With you by my side
Making all my worries go without a trace
With you by my side
Hand in hand we make this world a better place*

*While we each come from a different place
We all have one goal that we embrace
So we need to quicken up our pace
With great love our world is filled with grace*

*With you by my side
Giving me a smile to brighten up my days
With you by my side
When I'm sad you give me such a warm embrace
With you by my side
Making all my worries go without a trace
With you by my side
Hand in hand we make this world a better place
Hand in hand we make this world a better place*



“With you by my side, hand in hand we make this world a better place.”

I wrote this song in 2008, four years after I joined the Tzu Chi family. This song captures my mental transformation from a lonely soul to a person filled with joy and love. Through this song, I wished to express my appreciation to all Tzu Chi volunteers.

As individuals, we are different in many ways. But we unite for a common dream: to make this world a better place. Like a family, we share each other's worries and happiness. A simple smile and a gentle hug from you bring me warmth and courage. If everyone can practice tolerance and forgiveness, there will be no prejudice or hatred. Let us join hands to spread love and compassion around the world! With you by my side, I will never feel alone.

Patrick Chou has been a Tzu Chi volunteer since 2004. He has participated in various disaster relief missions in the US, Haiti, Peru, and Mexico. In Haiti, he helped organize many local volunteer projects and initiated a Moringa tree planting project.



Illustrations: Iris Yeh

Music, like love, can form connections between people, no matter when or where. Tzu Chi volunteers will often sing Tzu Chi songs with people to bring hope and joy in troubled times. Please scan the QR code on this page to enjoy the music video for this song.

QR Code link should go to here : <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTYmjGkPDfxiv03ZS276Kw41A7WodXT6r>



Okonomiyaki

Amy Chiu / Photos and Translation by Steven Chiu

The greatest blessing in life is peace. The greatest joy in life is love.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

After a series of cold days, on a sunny Thanksgiving Day, I finally had the chance to go to the local nursing home to visit Sister Chang. Sister Chang had been a Tzu Chi volunteer for decades, and as I made my way to visit her, I remember all the food we enjoyed and the memories of our time together in Tzu Chi.

I remember how Sister Chang accompanied and led me on the Tzu Chi path with love and compassion. When she described her experiences and told her stories of Tzu Chi, her descriptions were so vivid, it was as if what she was telling me what had just happened the day before. Sister Chang had joined Tzu Chi after participating in a Tzu Chi medical event. It was a rainy day, and doctors held umbrellas for all the visitors. Seeing the doctors providing such care in their actions really touched and impressed her.

In 1994, Sister Chang became a certified commissioner. She soon became a teacher for Tzu Chi community classes including vegetarian cooking classes, sign language classes, and sewing classes. She wasted no time, quickly taking the initiative to lead several projects. With her passion for Tzu Chi, she even built a recycling station at her house. Sister Chang would always invite volunteers over and prepare many vegetarian dishes such as taro rice noodles and rice porridge to share with them. Sister Chang realized that sharing food is a wonderful way to touch people's hearts and promote vegetarianism at the same time. I always remember the delicious food that Sister Chang made.

Sister Chang's favorite moments in Tzu Chi were in teaching the vegetarian cooking classes. Learning to cultivate diligence, happiness,



Friends visiting Sister Chang during Thanksgiving.

compassion, love, and gratitude from Master's teachings, Sister Chang always carefully confirmed that she had enough materials and ingredients for classes beforehand. She brought Tzu Chi culture to her 5-star cuisine. One of her popular cooking classes was on making Okonomiyaki. Students were always excited to learn about, prepare, and cook this dish. After class, one student later shared how much her family really enjoyed the dish. Her children wanted to eat it every day, and she had been cooking Okonomiyaki for the entire week!

Sister Chang is now 86 years old. Because Sister Chang grew up with a Japanese cultural influence, she always strived to achieve precision and beauty in her cooking. In Japanese, a vegetarian diet is known as a “healthy and diligent” diet (精進料理) since it fosters both health and diligence. In preparing food, Sister Chang is truly a Bodhisattva of diligence.

Visiting Sister Chang that Thanksgiving Day, I had the chance to bring her my sincere good wishes and gratitude. At the same time, I fully received love, warmth, and care from her. I know that I will never be lonely walking the Tzu Chi path because Sister Chang and my Tzu Chi family are always with me.



Sister Chang teaching vegetarian cooking class in Tzu Chi San Dimas Headquarters.

Ingredients

- 1 cup of all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup of cold water
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups of shredded cabbage
- 6 slices of white mushrooms
- 3 slices of diced Veggie ham
- 1 shredded carrot
- 1 stick of diced celery
- 3 tablespoon of oil for frying

Seasoning:

- ½ teaspoon of salt
- ½ teaspoon of sugar
- a pinch of mushroom powder
- a pinch of white pepper

Toppings:

- small bag of mayonnaise
- vegetarian hoisin sauce
- seaweed/sesame seeds

Okonomiyaki

■張蘇宜

Directions

1. Begin by shredding and dicing the vegetables (cabbage, mushrooms, carrots, veggie ham, celery)
2. In a large bowl, whisk together 2 large eggs and add $\frac{3}{4}$ cups of cold water until smooth.
3. Add 1 cup of all-purpose flour into the large bowl and mix until a thick, smooth batter is formed.
4. Add the seasoning into the batter (salt, sugar, mushroom powder, white pepper)
5. Add the cabbage, mushrooms, carrots, veggie ham, and celery to the batter, and then stir until everything is mixed together.
6. In a non-stick pan, add 1 tablespoon of oil.
7. Take 1 scoop of the vegetable and batter mix and place into the pan. Press the mix down and cook until golden brown on both sides.
8. Once done, add a layer of vegetarian hoisin sauce on top. Drizzle mayonnaise on top of the vegetarian hoisin sauce.
9. Lastly, add the seaweed/sesame seeds to the top of the hoisin sauce. Enjoy!





Vatican

◀ On September 27, Rey Her, Director of Tzu Chi's Humanistic Culture Development Department, traveled with European Tzu Chi volunteers to Vatican City to meet with Pope Francis. In addition to sending regards to the Pope on behalf of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, Rey Her also presented a Tzu Chi brochure and spoke about future cooperation on the issues of refugees, environmental protection, and medical care. Here, Rey Her presents gifts to Pope Francis.
(Photo provided by the Press Office of the Holy See)



Japan

On November 29, Tzu Chi volunteers from Tzu Chi Japan Branch Office partnered with the local charity Sanyukai to hold a winter distribution by Tokyo's Sumida River, providing hot meals and cold weather supplies, like eco-friendly blankets, to the homeless.
(Photo by Li Yuefeng)



Cambodia

◀ The rainy season in Cambodia lasts from August to November each year. The District of Chbar Ampov in Phnom Penh suffered from flooding. Volunteers immediately traveled to the disaster area to assess the damage and went back on November 18 to hold a rice distribution.
(Photo by Hong Wenqing)

The Philippines



In late December, central Philippines was hit by Typhoon Kai Tak and suffered severe damage. Tzu Chi volunteers went to the Tzu Chi Great Love Village in Ormoc City to distribute cleaning supplies and tools to help the villagers clean their homes.
(Photo by Li Ciguang)

Myanmar



▲ On November 11, Tzu Chi volunteers in Myanmar traveled to the Aung Theik Monastery School in Alini village, Bago Province, to hold a free clinic for impoverished villagers.
(Photo by Jiang Xiang Xian)

Nepal



▲ On December 9, Tzu Chi volunteers from Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Branch Office visited Mahendra Elementary School in Nepal to hold distributions and free medical clinics. Here, volunteers provide health education to the villagers, teaching them the correct way to wash their hands to prevent disease.
(Photo by Hong Qingping)



Mainland China



▲ In early July, China's Hunan Province suffered many days of heavy rain. On December 9, Tzu Chi volunteers went to Huitang Town in Ningxiang City, to hold a winter distribution at Xieleqiao Middle School. Here, Tzu Chi volunteers and members from local volunteer groups work together to move rice and set up the distribution venues. (Photo by Wang Mei Sui)



Malaysia

▲ The Kampung Titingan in Sabah, Malaysia, is an illegal settlement with many huts. Over two-thirds of the population is comprised of stateless people. Poor living conditions coupled with little health awareness have greatly affected the health and well-being of the residents. On November 18 and 19, volunteers from Tzu Chi Tawau Liaison Office went to Sabah to provide free clinics and health education to safeguard the health of the disadvantaged ethnic groups.

(Photo by Lin Siyuan)



New Zealand

▲ Tzu Chi New Zealand offers care for the elders of the Stroke Foundation on a long term basis. On November 13, volunteers visited the Stroke Foundation office and held an early Christmas celebration for the elders there.

(Photo by Wu Mei Rui)

Serbia



On December 16, Tzu Chi distributed winter clothing to refugees. Local Serbian volunteer Tamara (center) led many young people to help with the distribution. (Source: Screenshot from Serbia Winter Clothing Distribution Report)



Mexico

▲ After an earthquake hit Puebla State, Mexico in September, Tzu Chi volunteers and medical teams from 12 countries and regions departed on December 3 to provide large-scale distributions and free medical clinics. Here, volunteer Henry Tuan embraces local residents. (Photo provided by disaster relief team)



Haiti

▲ In the Caribbean island nation of Haiti, local people suffer from poverty. Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States continue to provide care for them. From October 16 to October 20, Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States and Haiti held a large-scale distribution in Port-Au-Prince. The rice provided for the distribution came from Taiwan, with the wish that it would also inspire love in the hearts of the people of Haiti. (Photo by Grace Chen)



Indonesia



◀ In order to promote friendship among different those of different faiths, the Indonesian government invited Tzu Chi Indonesia Branch Office to co-organize the year's Islamic Schools' Student Festival. The festival presented artistic performances that exhibited the harmony among different ethnic groups and religions. In addition, religious leaders and representatives participated in the festival, demonstrating the tolerance and respect among different groups in Indonesian society. Here, volunteers, guests, and students from Nurul Iman Islamic School pose for a group picture.

(Photo by Anand Yahya)

Guatemala



◀ On November 19, 2017, Tzu Chi Guatemala Service Center partnered with San José Pinula Municipality to hold a distribution for physically challenged and underprivileged seniors. (Photo by Peggy Chiu)

A Commitment to Serve

Steven Chen

Blessed are those who constantly bless themselves and create blessings for others.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

The sun is not out yet, but there are already a host of sounds coming from the kitchen. Water flows smoothly out of the faucet and into large pots and coffee urns waiting to catch their fall. Tiny beads of sugar and crystals of instant creamer shuffle around and quickly fill smaller serving containers. The sweet, strong smells of

fresh oatmeal, warm homemade cookies, and jelly-filled pastries fill the air.

An hour later, the aromas of breakfast are joined by those of freshly brewed coffee and tea. The piping hot oatmeal is ready to eat and the pastries look tastier than ever. Wan-Yu Chen smiles as the other Tzu Chi and Tzu Ching (Tzu



Wan-Yu Chen serves pastries at a weekly breakfast service distribution.



Chi Collegiate Association) volunteers begin to arrive. After a warm greeting, the volunteers begin a massive operation to move the breakfast foods a few hundred steps away into a waiting car. Volunteers walk up and down the sidewalk path, carrying the trays of pastries, pots of oatmeal, and urns of hot beverages from Wan-Yu's home to the vehicle, avoiding the piercing frost and wind that seek to steal away as much of the heat as possible. By the time the volunteers are done, drops of sweat have formed on their faces.

Today is Saturday – the date of Tzu Chi's weekly breakfast service distribution. For nearly two decades, Tzu Chi has partnered with local bakeries to provide donated pastries and warm coffee to residents at homeless shelters around our nation's capital. No matter what the elements throw at them, Wan-Yu and her fellow Tzu Chi volunteers remain steadfast in their mission to serve those in need.

Light snow has begun to fall by the time the volunteers arrive at the first of the two shelters. This shelter is considered an emergency shelter, allowing those in need to seek refuge only for the evening and night. In the morning, those who stayed must leave the shelter and take all their belongings with them. Only during winter emergencies – when the outside temperature is below freezing – can residents take refuge in the shelter for the entire day. Despite the falling snow, a winter emergency has not been declared this time.

As Tzu Chi volunteers quickly mobilize to set up the meal service, the residents begin to gather in an orderly line while maintaining the shape of a huddled mass. Each resident clutches on to their items, recognizing the subtle order among the seemingly chaotic scene.

Wan-Yu comments on the frigidness and explains that serving breakfast in the cold allows her to empathize with some of what the homeless endure. Knowing that they would appreciate a hot meal, she made the vow to cook and bring hot oatmeal during the winter months. This would require waking up earlier and preparing more food – small efforts demonstrating great love.

The breakfast distribution proceeds smoothly with Tzu Chi volunteers gratefully asking each individual for their preferred choice of breakfast food and hot beverage. There is a sense of mindfulness in their actions: volunteers bow to express gratitude and respect to those that they serve. The materials they use reflect a sense of great love for the Earth. Volunteers serve coffee in compostable cups; sugar, creamer, and other condiments are stirred in for the homeless to limit the number of disposables used. Paper bags are used instead of recycled plastic, and even their use is minimized. Many of these environmental initiatives began after Wan-Yu started to manage the program – shortly after she became coordinator, for example, she insisted on not using polystyrene Styrofoam cups during the distribution anymore. “It is an obligation for us to conduct this breakfast service with compassion,” she tells me. “And we must conduct this distribution not just with compassion, but with wisdom as well.”

Karmic Affinity

Born and raised in Taiwan, Wan-Yu immigrated with her family to the United States in the late 1990s. In 2001, she enrolled her eldest son in Tzu Chi Academy, which at that time was accepting its first class of students. Little did she know that she would eventually serve as a volunteer coordinator for many of their charity and community events. By the time her sons graduated from Tzu Chi Academy, she had already volunteered her time as a teacher for the school, served as a classroom parent, and coordinated the school's visits to the local nursing home to entertain their elderly residents.

During these formative years with Tzu Chi, she also began to participate in – and later coordinate – visits to the Children's Inn at the National Institutes of Health. The Inn provides a home to children and their families participating in clinical trials for new and experimental drugs and therapies. Once a month, Wan-Yu leads Tzu Chi and Tzu Ching volunteers to provide a delicious vegetarian dinner for the 60-100

residents, many of whom are unfamiliar with the local area and may not speak English.

Preparing a meal for close to 100 individuals is not an easy task. It requires an understanding of the food dishes that the residents would enjoy eating – expertise which develops only after serving them for over a decade. It requires managing the many volunteers who carefully braise, mince, and stir-fry seemingly unconnected ingredients to cook a delicious dish. Wan-Yu balances these responsibilities while masterfully cooking several dishes herself, gracefully chopping vegetables and seasoning them to perfection.

The dishes are being plated just as residents begin to arrive for dinner. Families often stroll in with faces of skepticism; after all, ethnic Taiwanese dishes are being served to those who may not even be able to identify Taiwan on a world map. But month after month, meal after meal, the hesitation always succumbs to the relentless onslaught of succulent flavors and textures that ultimately bring smiles to their faces and warmth to their hearts.

Wan-Yu struggles to describe the immense happiness, joy, and gratitude she feels when she sees those smiles on the families' faces. She wholeheartedly recalls and understands Master Cheng Yen's reminder that when we give, we also receive. "Our goal here is to empower ourselves and those we serve with the spirit of Great Love,"

she explains. "It is to show others that we care for them, that their pain is our pain. We hope we can inspire others to serve, to light the candle in their hearts, and engender respect and love for our fellow community members. That is our blessing."

The Time Is Now

As this morning's meal distribution ends, the shelter residents say goodbye to Wan-Yu, who they have come to affectionately call "Mama." The volunteers pack the remaining pastries back into the van to be used the next day, Sunday, at a new distribution site.

Six years after participating in her first breakfast distribution and three years since expanding their services to the Sunday distribution site, Wan-Yu's wholehearted support for the effort remains. She wakes up early on both Saturdays and Sundays to brew coffee and prepare the pastries for the distributions. She constantly searches for ways to innovate, to better serve the homeless, and to be more mindful. She hopes to begin sharing Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si aphorisms with the shelter residents.

I ask her if she ever finds the charity work mentally tiring or physically exhausting. She rejects such a perspective. "It is a privilege to serve," she states matter-of-factly. "It is what I should do. I hope that I will be able to do so for many years. Few can do so; few have the physical and financial means to. It is thus my responsibility to recognize this blessing and cultivate more."

Wan-Yu reminds those around her that to walk the Bodhisattva path, one must serve the less fortunate. Service humbles. It grounds. It exposes. It tests empathy. It nurtures compassion. It fosters wisdom. It enlightens. "It all starts with service. Without serving others, you cannot begin to cultivate yourself."



Sister Chen (left) mindfully prepares food for attendees of the 2017 US TCCA Leadership Conference.



Sister Chen accompanies Tzu Ching volunteers at the University of Maryland as they raise donations for Hurricane Harvey relief efforts.

Reflection

I smile as Wan-Yu Chen explains the importance of serving others. I have heard this many times before. After all, Wan-Yu Chen is my mother. She embodies what it means to be a Bodhisattva: to serve as the source of relief and support for all living beings and to enable them to cultivate a great field of blessings. Week after week, she steadfastly serves our neighbors living on the streets of Washington, D.C. Day after day, she inspires her family, friends, acquaintances, and Tzu Ching volunteers to serve others.

When I first told her of my intention to write this article about her service with Tzu Chi, she told me to find someone else, pointing to the tremendous work done by other Tzu Chi volunteers in the region. After my insistence, she agreed to be interviewed, though she asked me to profile her time with Tzu Chi in the context of the two charity projects that she coordinates. Respecting her wishes, I did not capture many other aspects of her diligence and commitment to service and spiritual cultivation with Tzu Chi. I did not describe, for example, how she balances

her charity work with two part-time jobs that fill up most of her weekdays and weekend evenings. I also did not elaborate how the sudden passing of her husband – my father – affected how she views her work with Tzu Chi, her blessings, her purpose in life, and her motivations to serve.

I write this piece with great humility and gratitude. It is impossible to describe in such a brief essay all her experiences with Tzu Chi and her contributions to society. I cannot describe in enough detail the lessons she has shared with other Tzu Chi volunteers. Nor can I express in words her unconditional love and support for me, my brother, and countless other individuals. I sincerely hope that stories such as my mother's will inspire the next generation to give of themselves selflessly and walk the Bodhisattva path. 🌱

Steven Chen is a Tzu Chi volunteer. As part of his work, he has facilitated workshops exploring the meaning and intersection of service, faith, and philanthropy around the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.



Speaking to a food pantry volunteer and recipient about Ethical Eating Day,

From *Her Table* to Yours

Alex King

Life is most fulfilling when we are able to do our best to help others at every moment.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

Doris Chang glances at the clock above the reception desk – it reads 10:30 am. She has been working for several hours without any breaks, but taking a breather is the last thing on her mind. With vegetables that still need to be washed and roles that still need to be assigned, this Saturday at Mid-Atlantic Region's New Jersey office, the Tzu Chi Food Pantry begins, like many other Saturdays in the last 7 years, busily but unremarkably. The journey to get to this point, however, was far from straightforward.

22 years ago, Doris Chang started a lifelong commitment to Tzu Chi Foundation. Doris's dedication to Tzu Chi began with just a few donations to the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, and

she later becomes a volunteer. Soon after, Doris immigrated to the United States and became one of the first members to join Tzu Chi's New Jersey branch. Focusing on her self-cultivation, Doris listened to Master's teachings every day during her four-hour commute to and from work at Long Island. When asked about her first volunteer experience, Doris recalled with a chuckle, "Due to a hurricane that hit Taiwan, I attended a fundraising event outside a Chinese supermarket for the first time. Just an hour later, I began feeling dizzy and had to be sent home!" Despite this unfortunate first experience, Doris is now head of the spiritual care team for Tzu Chi USA's Mid-Atlantic region. Her many jobs include helping to lead the food pantry,



organizing home visitations, holding training classes, and running a book club. Recently, she also became determined to start a transcription calligraphy class after being inspired in a Tzu Chi retreat in Taiwan last October. With nothing more than a suitcase full of materials and her own conviction, Doris was hesitant about her ability to garner interest for the class and teach the class properly. In the end, she realized that she would never know unless she tried; with Master's mantra of "Just do it," Doris held her first class. The turnout was high, and she set a high standard for future classes. Indeed, Doris's attitude and mindset have been the defining characteristics of everything she becomes involved in.

As more and more recipients trickle into the food pantry reception area, it is almost time to begin. A moment of silence is held until a familiar melody gently introduces itself, "Let us pray for peace in our land, keep our hearts from sorrows and pain..." Many of the recipients look familiar with the song and mouth the lyrics while some simply look on peacefully. An idea that Doris had come up with herself, playing the song "Love and Care for All" is now done before every food pantry event officially starts. As the song ends, Doris quickly walks over to the central room and readies the TV to play this week's video. By using a different video every week while keeping the song the same, she can use the familiarity the song

provides to open up new doors without running the risk of alienation or disinterest. This wise and creative idea is certainly representative of Doris's long relationship with Tzu Chi.

Doris has been conducting home visits in all sorts of conditions for over 21 years. These visitations are often to comfort family members during times of grief or stress, particularly during natural disasters or when someone passes away. An instance that stands out in particular occurred immediately following the 9/11 attacks, when Doris went to comfort a woman whose husband was missing following the attacks on the Twin Towers. The tension in the air was palpable as Doris entered the house. The wife felt understandably helpless and was not able to control the emotions she was feeling. All Doris could do was comfort her by staying by her side and chanting Buddhist sutras.

It was a time of great uncertainty and was particularly nerve-wracking for everyone directly involved. Without confirmation of a person's status, there was nothing to do but continue to wait for news. Doris herself was affected by the attacks on the Twin Towers, as her husband worked nearby. It was while she waited to hear from her family that she realized how

important it is to cherish what we have and be grateful for the things we normally take for granted.



A food pantry recipient returning a full bamboo bank to Sister Doris,



Sister Doris helping to unload food items for a distribution.

In another case that has stayed with Doris, an illegal immigrant from Thailand who worked at a Chinese restaurant suddenly fell into a coma and was hospitalized. Worried, and halfway across the globe in Thailand, the man's daughter tried everything she could to obtain a visa to come to the United States. She was eventually able to obtain one, but only due to her father's medical condition. Seeing her father again after 10 years should have been a joyous occasion, but to meet under such circumstances was truly heartbreaking. To make things worse, she was told by the hospital that she had to decide whether to take her father off life support due to his coma. She had to make this difficult decision at the age of 23. Doris visited the daughter often and brought her food throughout the long hours she would spend at the hospital. She was touched by the daughter's persistent attempts to speak to her father and wake him up from his coma, and she tried to give the daughter any advice that she could. Doris eased the daughter's fears and doubts, giving her faith in herself. Recognizing

her father's deteriorating condition, the daughter eventually made the difficult decision to remove his life support.

Through the many years that Doris has been doing home visitations, there have been many tragic stories like this one. Doris believes that even though many of these visitations often end in sorrow, Tzu Chi plays an important part in bringing comfort to those who have no support. "We act as Bodhisattvas for those we help. We come when they need our assistance and do all we can to make them feel loved and cared for." Countless visitations and heart-wrenching stories later, Doris has not lost any of her passion for bringing warmth to others.

Doris looks around the room to make sure that everyone knows their roles and checks to see that all the stations are running smoothly. The food pantry is full of life as volunteers hustle back and forth between stations delivering receipts and item requests. There was a time when the food pantry was neither this busy, nor this varied in the food it offered. Doris remembers how, at the beginning,

only a few volunteers were around to help pick up the food from the food bank and transport it in their vans to the regional office. Without the option to pick out meat items, the food pantry started off with a minimal selection of products. It was only after developing bonds with food bank workers and maintaining these good relations that the food pantry was able to obtain more vegetarian options and improve the recipients' experience. Truly, many things get easier and better with experience. When it comes to tragedy, however, nothing is ever easy.

In 2012, Doris's husband suddenly passed away. It was only a short two months between the initial symptoms and the time of his passing. Before then, during her home visits, Doris always told people not to overthink things, reassuring them that everything would be okay. Now facing such a difficult turn of events herself, she found that following the advice was not nearly as simple as just giving it. At this time, many Tzu Chi volunteers came to comfort her and provide her with the same support she had given to others in the many years before. Doris had to complete many of the tasks that she would usually do with home visits, such as handling hospital paperwork and chanting Buddhist sutras. This time though, it was for her husband. These duties would have been much more difficult to complete if not for her experience and well-disciplined mind. After using Master Cheng Yen's teachings to help other people for such a long time, she also became a recipient of these blessings during her time of hardship. After years of home visits, Doris now

truly understands the mindset of those who are suffering and can offer her own experiences to comfort them.

Through her work and personal experiences, Doris's dedication to help others has never wavered. The only thing she has lost is energy, and she knows that time is running out. Doris is using every bit of her remaining energy and time

to make sure the next generation of Tzu Chi volunteers are well-prepared to take on the work and projects that she's done during her time with Tzu Chi. She often urges young volunteers to "Just do it." This is the same mantra she repeats to herself when faced with obstacles or uncertainties. In Doris, we can see that in order to help others, all we need is the willingness to take action.

4:00 pm draws near as Doris finishes cleaning the food pantry area. The recipients had gone home two hours earlier, but there were still many physical tasks and much paperwork to complete. She figures that, with traffic, she'll end up getting back home around 7:00 pm as usual. With so many energetic, young volunteers, the food pantry event ended without a hitch. Doris closes the doors to the office behind her with a smile and heads home, ready to do it all again next week. 

Alex King is an undergraduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle. He has been volunteering since he was just a few years old. As the Co-President of the Seattle Tzu Ching Chapter, he routinely works with Tzu Chi volunteers and collegiate volunteers.



Sister Doris gives a demonstration at her Sutra of Infinite Meaning calligraphy class, 11/28/2017.



A Spirit of Love After Hurricane

Pen-Chi Liun

A fulfilling life is not preoccupied with material objects, prestige, or power. It is a life that is filled with true friendships, sharing, and caring for each other.

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

On August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall near Rockport, Texas as a Category 4 hurricane. Over the next 4 days, as much as 64 inches of rain poured from the weakened and stagnating storm over parts of the Houston metropolitan area. Over 25% of the city was submerged, and over 48,700 homes were affected by the flooding. More than one month later, many people who had been displaced were still living in hotels or temporary lodging. The more

severely affected subdivisions were still like ghost towns, as the houses in these neighborhoods were uninhabitable, awaiting repairs.

As soon as the roads were passable on August 30, Tzu Chi volunteers who were not affected by the flooding began to mobilize for disaster relief. Since the airports were not fully operational even a week after the storm, most relief supplies could not arrive for another week. A few of us Tzu Ching (Tzu Chi Collegiate Association)

Hurricane Harvey caused widespread and devastating floods around the Houston area.



Harvey

Alumni members felt that while we waited for the supplies, we could do something physically and directly to help those who had been affected by the flood. So on Friday, September 1, we began to organize a cleanup crew to help flood survivors clean and gut their houses.

The first household we went to help was in Kingwood. One of the homeowners had posted a plea for help on Facebook, and many people, friends and strangers alike, had responded. We decided to join the effort after seeing her post. As soon as the car turned into the neighborhood street, we could see piles and piles of furniture, appliances, dirty clothes and household items, gutted drywalls, and wet carpets in front of every house. Floodwater had reached the first floor ceilings in most houses in this neighborhood,

damaging everything inside them. When we arrived at one of the houses, there were already many other volunteers working. We introduced ourselves to the lady of the house. A carpenter was going around to all the houses in the neighborhood helping homeowners gut their houses, and he gave us instructions on what to do.

The ten of us went inside to begin working. The room we were assigned to was a daughters' bedroom. It was filled with her childhood toys, dolls, old photos, and drawings. As I carried these things out for the lady to see, she would always hesitate before telling me certain items were trash. I could see that these items meant so much to her, and I could see her struggle to keep her emotions in. Everything I brought to her was part of her life, her daughter's life. The items represented her happy memories, and now most of them could not be



Volunteers move gutted dry walls out of a flooded house.





Tzu Chi volunteers help a Kingwood resident clean her house.

saved. It was truly sad and after a while, difficult for me to see. I could really see her suffering and feel her sorrow.

At lunchtime, a lady with two small children went around the neighborhood to pass out sandwiches and water to everyone. We later found out that the closest restaurant that was open nearby was five miles away. It is truly touching that people who did not know each other were working together to help those in need, and everyone was so grateful to each other.

The next day, we went to Missouri City to help my husband's co-worker, a single mother with a baby who had been staying at our house after leaving her own house on August 28. She told us that the city had issued the evacuation order in the morning, and by noon, the road was barely passable. She only had time to grab a few items of clothing and some things for her baby before she had to leave. The water rose so quickly that by the afternoon, people had to be evacuated by boat. She lamented

how many things needed to be cleaned up and how much time and money would be needed to replace household items and repair the house. She worried about what the future would hold for her and her baby. I could see that she was very troubled. My husband and I tried our best to comfort her and offered her help in whatever way we could. The company she works for has about 50 employees, and about half of them had turned out to gut the house the previous day. We joined them on the second day to sweep out dirt,



Tzu Chi volunteers with volunteers of LDS (Church of Latter Day Saints).



Tzu Chi volunteers

pick up trash, and spray bleach. There were also many volunteers from the LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) working in her neighborhood alongside us. One neighbor drove around to offer everyone barbecue plates for lunch. Another brought noodles and fruits for everyone. Despite the difficulty of the situation, the spirit of camaraderie was truly amazing.

A week later, we joined Pete (son of Sister Su-yen Lin, a Tzu Chi commissioner in Houston) to help an elderly gentleman to clean up his flood-damaged home. The elderly gentleman was Pete's neighbor and had developed a very close bond with him. He had refused help from everyone, including friends and neighbors, until Pete talked to him. After getting his permission to help, Pete organized a group of about a dozen volunteers from his church and from Tzu Chi to help with the cleaning effort. Since this was over a week after the flood, the house reeked with a foul smell, and mold had started to grow. During the clean-up, Pete constantly talked to the elderly gentleman to ensure he was comfortable with the cleaning and made sure his belongings did not get thrown out against his wishes. The love and care Pete showed toward the elderly gentleman was so inspiring to see. It really motivated us to be careful and mindful of everything we touched.

In recent times, many in the media often lament the loss of neighborliness. People no longer receive cookies or brownies when they move into a new neighborhood; they no longer sit outside on the front porch to chat with passing neighbors walking their dogs; children no longer play on the street or go around asking for candy on Halloween, and people often fail to spend time with each other and talk with their loved ones. The flood disaster changed all this. Over the month of September, we went to clean houses every weekend. Some of us would also participate in the cash card distributions and health fairs, helping to unload relief supplies, call flood survivors, or enter data after work. Throughout these experiences, we have met countless people who, regardless of their differences, worked together to help those in need. Without being asked, many volunteers from other parts of Texas came to help people evacuate. As long as they had a boat, they would go out to help others. We saw neighbors helping neighbors and co-workers helping co-workers; people were helping those they didn't even know. Many women with small children who could not help to clean houses prepared food to pass around. Although most of the houses we visited had mountains of things homeowners were reluctant to throw out, and although many homeowners



cooperate with other organizations to clean houses.



Tzu Ching Alumni with volunteers of All Hands.



Volunteers remove wet wood floors in a flooded house.



had lost most of the things they owned, they were so grateful for even the slightest gesture from others to help. There are so many people with so much love in their hearts.

Hurricane Harvey caused such widespread damage, and many of our friends, neighbors, and families were directly affected. After my experiences, I realized the truth of the teachings we often hear in Tzu Chi: The climate is unstable, the world is impermanent, people's situations can change in an instant, and anyone can suffer the consequences. I realized that we must cherish our

blessings and make the most of our time, working even harder to share our blessings with others. I also realized that even though material things may not last, love and friendship from friends and strangers alike can warm people's hearts and bring hope for the future. Despite the hardships and difficulties, I am truly grateful for everyone I have encountered and for this extraordinary experience. 

Pen-Chi Liu and her husband are both long-term Tzu Chi volunteers in Houston. Pen-Chi is especially active as a documentation and translation volunteer.

Dharma Q&A

Dharma Master Cheng Yen responds to questions from visitors, volunteers, staff, and disciples



Anyone can be a Bodhisattva

Q: "Can anyone become a Bodhisattva?"

A: "Yes, we teach people how to become Bodhisattvas; to believe that if the Buddha and Bodhisattvas can do it, then we can do it also. The Buddha has a loving heart, and you also have a loving heart. We should always emulate the compassion and vows of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, not just pray for their blessings or protection."

A Field of Blessings

Q: "I heard that when you were fundraising to build the hospital, a Japanese man was willing to donate two hundred million U.S. dollars, but you did not accept it. Why?"

A: "Because there is a difference between one person having a good thought and tens of millions of people having good thoughts. If I had accepted the donation from that Japanese donor, Tzu Chi Hospital would not be what it is today. It may have functioned well as a hospital and been profitable, but it would not have the ability to inspire the intrinsic goodness of people. With intrinsic goodness and innate ability, people will not struggle over material gains. Instead, their hearts will be full of devotion and gratitude."

The Key to Success

Q: "It is a well-known fact that Tzu Chi does a lot of international charity work. What Tzu Chi has done and continues to do is unique in the world. Is there any secret to Tzu Chi's success?"

A: "No secret, just the very basic, but unshakable belief that there is love in everyone's heart. This is Tzu Chi's fundamental belief and the reason behind its achievements today. In Taiwan, there are many sincere and loving people who are willing to help others. A great number of Chinese people who live abroad have also spread the spirit of compassion and contributed to their local communities. Tzu Chi combines the strength of kind-hearted people in Taiwan and around the world to bring forth the mission of Great Love."

Excerpted from Friends from Afar compiled by Jing Si Editorial Group (Jing Si Publications, 2015). For more information, please visit Jing Si Books & Cafe or jingsi.us.tzuchi.org.

Nourishment and Compassion after the Santa Rosa Fires

Sae Yokoyama

If it is the right thing to do, just do it!

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

This past October, Northern California was devastated by a series of wildfires that destroyed 250,000 acres of land. The fire ravaged urban areas, displacing a total of 98,000 individuals, and resulted in 43 deaths and 183 hospitalizations. Santa Rosa County was one of the major urban areas affected by this fire. Long time Tzu Chi volunteer and commissioner Sally Wei was at the Santa Rosa office when the first fire began at 2:00 am on October 6th, 2017. Sally Wei was the first volunteer from Tzu Chi USA to respond to the fire. Her quick response was equal parts chance and bravery.

The night before the fire hit, Sally and her husband Greg were at the San Francisco Airport on their way to attend the Annual Tzu Chi USA Commissioner camp in Hualien, Taiwan. After finding that Sally's passport was missing, they returned back home to Santa Rosa. Rather than return to the airport, once the passport was found, the two decided to spend a night back at home

because their dog was frightened by the sudden, violent winds that were blowing all throughout Northern California. Sally recalls that the winds were strong enough that branches were blowing off of trees and street signs were flying off their posts.

The next morning at 4:00 am, Sally awoke to the sound of her dog barking. The moment she took a step outside, she realized that something was very wrong.

"It was the most chaotic scene I've ever witnessed in my life. The freeway in front of our house, the 101 going north, was completely empty, but all roads southbound were completely jammed. All everyone knew was they had to go south or towards the ocean. The only cars going north were firetrucks and ambulances."

Sally and Greg soon found that there was a large wildfire starting to move into their community. The two immediately decided to





drive back to San Francisco, pick up their things, come back to Santa Rosa, and start calling shelters to see how they could help.

By 9:00 am, Sally and Greg were in action. Sally called a long term partner in the community, Catholic Charities, to ask how they could help. The first request they received was for food. By 11:30 am, Sally had arrived at the shelter with all the food she had in her home. When she came through the door with the food in her arms, a man who had evacuated his house the night before began to cry – the people at the shelter had had nothing to eat since dinner the night before.

The volunteers at the shelter requested more food as her initial tray could only feed 50 out of the 100 people staying there, and this did not include the individuals at the other shelters she was planning to visit. Knowing that she could not do it alone, Sally contacted the Tzu Chi Oakland office for help. When Sally asked for food for 1,000 individuals, the director of the Oakland office was incredulous. However, by 6:00 pm, they had brought the food she had demanded and had started their deliveries to the shelters. Sally comments, “They are angels, Bodhisattvas. They are the real heroes. They responded to my request so quickly – it was unbelievable. I am truly, truly grateful.”

By day three, supplies started coming in to the shelters, and the shelters were operating their own kitchens. However, Sally, Greg, and other Oakland volunteers continued to stay busy as they realized that many of the second responders – the individuals who worked to maintain the shelters – were vegetarian. Those volunteers had been eating salad for three straight days. The individuals were very happy to receive food other than salad. She recalls, “They were so happy. We then started making food for three shelters. There were hundreds of volunteers, and every time we walked in they said, ‘Wow, Tzu Chi’s vegetarian food is here! It was a happy moment for us.’”

As word spread about Oakland and Santa Rosa Tzu Chi Office’s contributions during

the fires, Tzu Chi volunteers from throughout California and beyond came to help. During this time, they were able to loan out Jing Si beds to the first responders and the disaster survivors. In total, they distributed 80 beds amongst the community. 15 Jing Si beds were distributed to the firefighters in the Santa Rosa area and 12 beds to a remote shelter far from the rest of the Santa Rosa community in Sonoma-Marin Fair. Another 63 beds were distributed to the emergency hotline center. The hotline was open 24 hours a day, but before they got the beds from Tzu Chi, the staff had no beds in the warehouse they were using as a resting area. The Jing Si beds were especially helpful to the firefighters – many of the beds were brought to the scene of the fire so that firefighters could rest as they continued to tackle the raging wildfire.

By the end of the week, 79 of the 80 beds were returned. The last one stayed with a person who, like many other survivors, remained sleeping in a tent for days after the fire had died down.

Most individuals would not think to risk their own lives by staying in an area just blocks away from the fires, dedicating themselves to help others. When asked to explain where her heroic actions stemmed from, Sally described how Tzu Chi has changed her. Ever humble, she explained that from Tzu Chi, she learned how to have compassion and empathy for others. “In Tzu



Sally Wei and her husband, Greg Tylawsky, serve hot food at a fire evacuation shelter in Santa Rosa.



Sally and other Tzu Chi volunteers demonstrate the Jing Si foldable bed for Santa Rosa fire department. Photo credit: Jenny Yao.

Chi, Master Cheng Yen taught us that what we do for others is our responsibility. Helping others is a mission we are born with.”

Sally and Greg's lack of fear stemmed from their recognition that everyone in the Santa Rosa needed help. This understanding was even more powerful than the potential dangers they faced. Even though many people were running for their lives, for Sally and Greg, life and death are simple matters. “Death is the beginning of new life. If I had to finish my life at that moment, so what? I will go to another life. I wasn't really thinking about whether I was scared or not. The first thought that I had was, ‘What can I do for those people who are scared?’ The other thought I had was, ‘I have to let go.’”

When asked how others can begin to apply their compassion as she did, Sally responded by quoting from the Samadhi Water Repentance. “It comes with practice – drop by drop, little by little.”

Even after the dangers of the fires have passed, many will still struggle. For those who lost their homes, finding a new home will be difficult; their houses must be rebuilt from the ground up. Sally comments “To tell you the truth, we can do

very little at this moment. A lot of people moved out, but most people remain in the city because they still have their job here, though they do not have their home. Every day we have people come in to the local assistance center and they start crying, not necessarily because they're touched by the material aid we give them, but because they are confused...the journey back to their normal life is going to be long.”

Tzu Chi's Santa Rosa chapter has a plan to continue helping these individuals who lost their homes to the fire. Volunteers plan on launching a multi-stage program to help guide these individuals towards a normal life. At every stage, Sally hopes that Tzu Chi can be there to support them.

Regardless of all the difficulties that Sally sees in the next few years, she continues to believe that with teamwork and hope, the community will be able to return to how it was. She says that one of Master's Jing Si aphorisms keeps her motivated to continue working hard for the survivors. “If it is the right thing, just do it.” 

Sae Yokoyama is a fourth year Biopsychology student at University of California, Davis. She has volunteered with Tzu Chi since middle school and aims to earn a PhD in Neuropsychology.



Sally and other Tzu Chi volunteers talk to a fire survivor in Santa Rosa. Photo credit: Jenny Yao.



Young
Bodhisattvas

Lessons for Life from a Disaster Survivor

Crystal Christian

Life is filled with pain and suffering but also with hope and love

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~



Crystal at the Hurricane Harvey relief distribution in Beaumont, Texas.

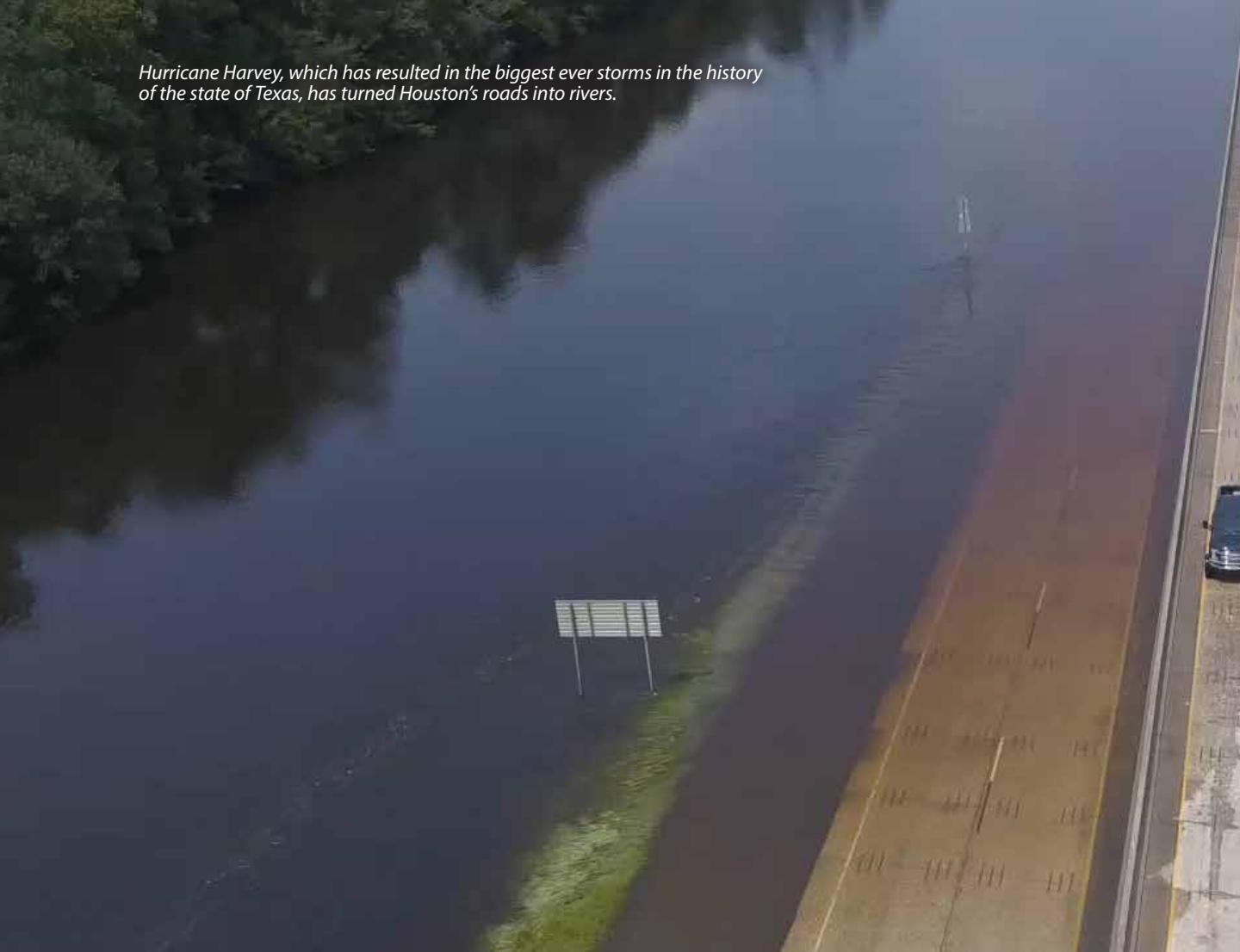
Eight years ago, my mother stopped me as I was getting ready to cannonball into our backyard pool. She sat me down and told me that we would be moving to New York. I remember feeling confused and a bit reluctant, as any 13-year-old would. I did not want to trade in my warm sunny Florida afternoons or riding my bike around the neighborhood for subway cars and freezing winters. My mom was a single mother of three children and supported my ill grandmother. New York was said to have opportunities that would be crucial in helping my mother support all of us, especially my grandmother. However, our transition did not occur as smoothly as we had all hoped. Due to a multitude of unavoidable circumstances, my family and I experienced a stint of housing instability after relocating. More than anything at the time, this experience proved

itself to be one of my biggest personal challenges.

Growing up, I had periodically volunteered and loved giving back, but prior to this experience, I had never been in a situation where I was on the receiving end. However, our situation meant that it was necessary for us to receive assistance from local organizations. I still remember the first coat drive I attended as a recipient and how my hand hesitated to accept the black padded jacket I was handed. The fact that I was in a predicament where I needed help was competing with my pride. I was so focused on the challenges I was experiencing that it hindered my ability to acknowledge the love and hope that was begging for me to take its hand. I was not at a point where I could smile, thank someone, and graciously allow myself to be picked up by a stranger.

As my family's living situation improved, I was able to again be the one who helped instead of the one who needed help. I gradually learned how to humble myself, and I came to realize that needing a helping hand in life is not a shameful thing. However, these changes in my mindset did not solidify until I joined Tzu Chi. That was where I realized that doing good deeds and cultivating myself should be a longstanding goal. During my three years of involvement in Tzu Chi, I have always been encouraged to be better than I was yesterday. Since receiving my Tzu Ching uniform in my Sophomore year, I've had the

Hurricane Harvey, which has resulted in the biggest ever storms in the history of the state of Texas, has turned Houston's roads into rivers.

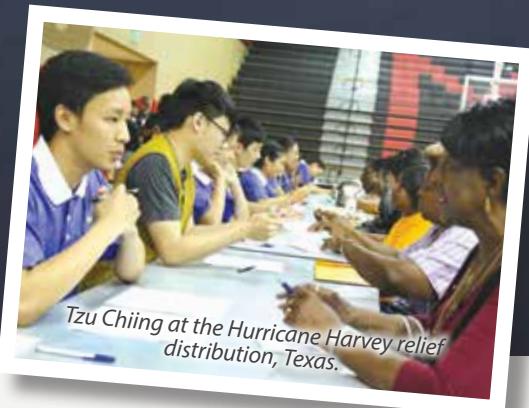
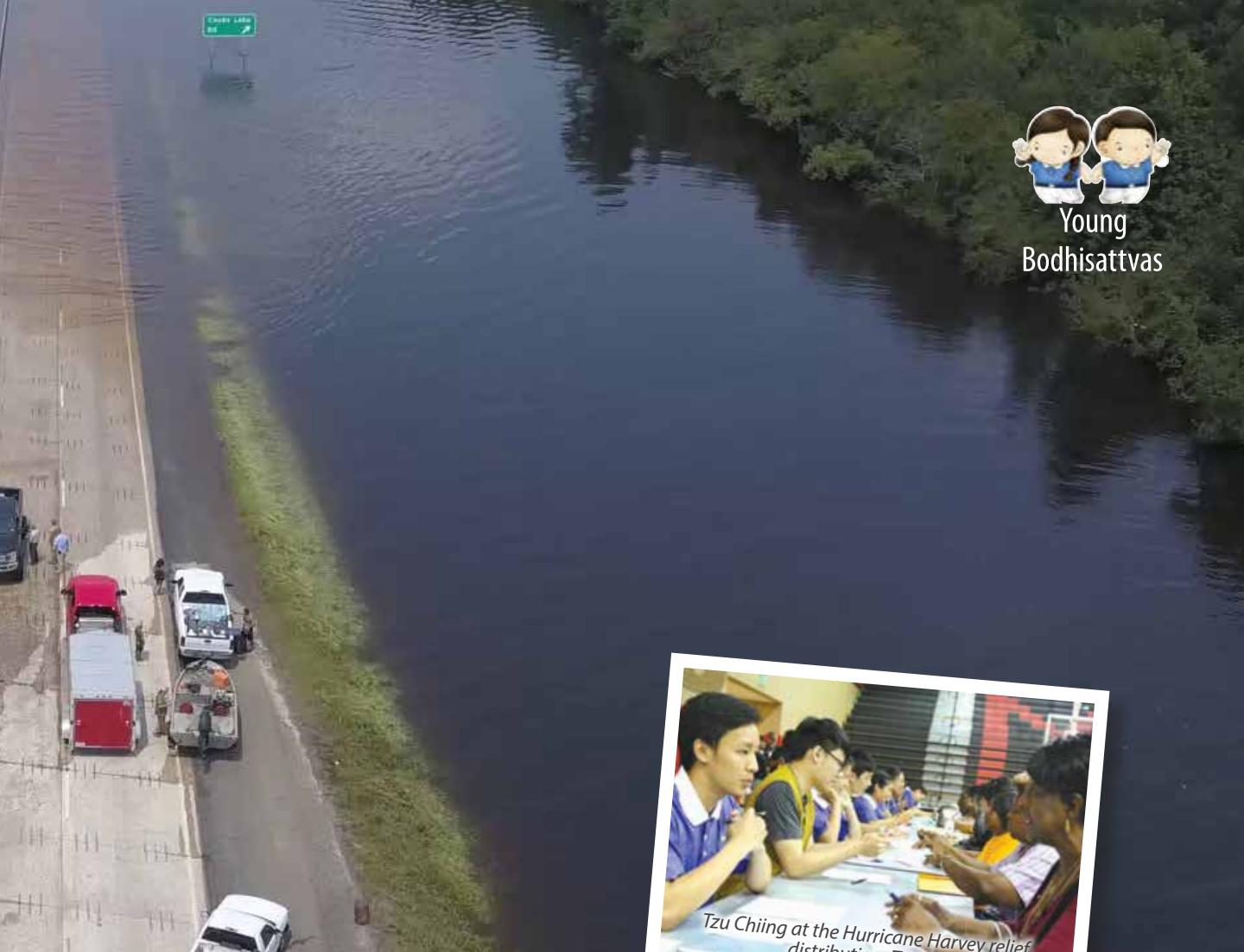


opportunity to participate in countless volunteer opportunities. Each one of these opportunities has taught me something new. The morning my phone went off and I saw I had a chance to help Hurricane Harvey survivors, I had a feeling that something extraordinary would happen. I did not hesitate to accept the offer to assist with the relief distributions in Texas.

However, during my first day in Houston, I mainly felt confused and overwhelmed. I felt like a new Tzu Ching again, uncertain about where to go or what to do with myself as I watched the other volunteers who all seemed so assured in their roles as they cared for the disaster survivors. It wasn't until my last day in Texas, during our relief distribution in Beaumont, that I suddenly experienced that extraordinary moment, just when I was least expecting it. I sat at the intake table ready to speak with my tenth or so local resident when a neatly dressed elderly man

sauntered over to the chair in front of me.

For the sake of his privacy, I will refer to him as Benjamin. Benjamin greeted me with a wide smile. I chatted with him about his experience with the hurricane. It wasn't much different from that of the other survivors—Benjamin's house had been flooded by seven feet of water. His entire home was destroyed, including small items that held tremendous sentimental value. Although he had lost everything, his smile never wavered, that is, until I handed him the cash card and explained how to properly use it. As he reached out for my hand, I saw tears fall from his eyes. "You don't understand what you have until it's all destroyed. I keep thinking about the moment that I threw my daughter's college diploma into the pile of rubbish...You just can't get those things back," he stammered in between his tears. It was almost as if the school gym that we were in had been cleared out and only the two



Tzu Chiing at the Hurricane Harvey relief distribution, Texas.

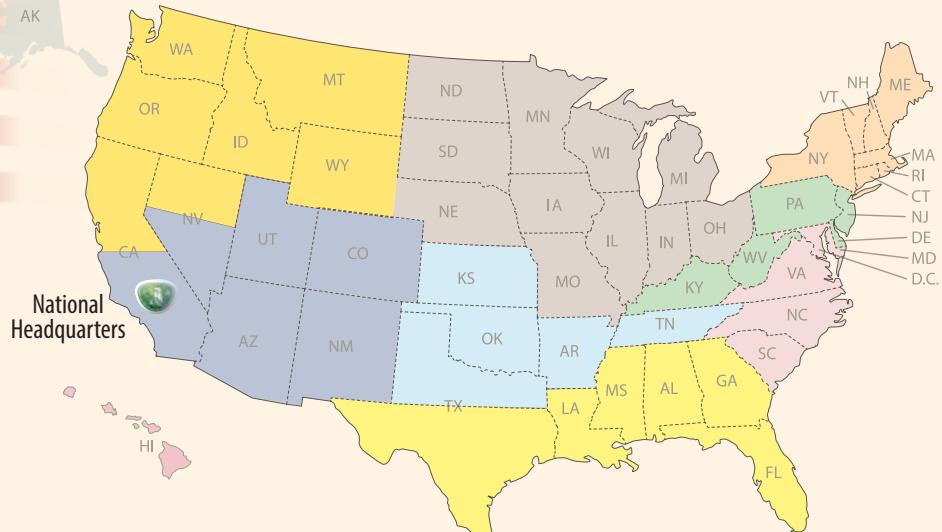
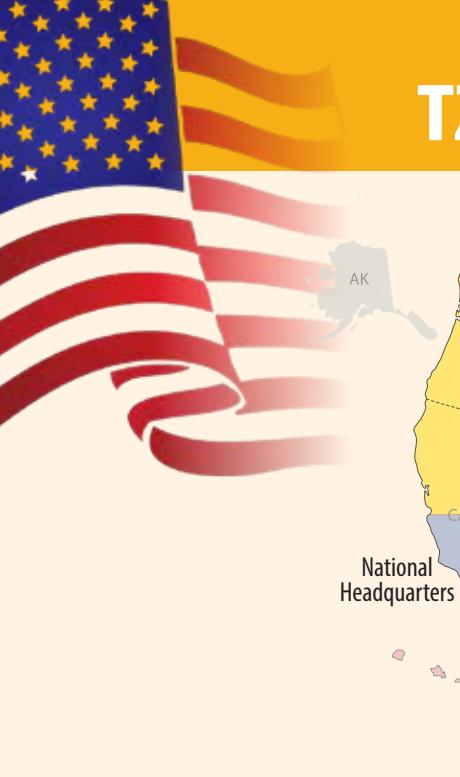
of us remained—arms outstretched across the table as we shared a few moments of silence. The only thing I could do for him was to continue to hold his hand and hope that he felt my sincerity. “I’m sorry. You didn’t need to hear all of that,” he continued. I quickly reassured him over my own shaky voice that it was an honor to hear his story and speak with him. With one last firm squeeze to my hand, he whispered an almost unintelligible “Thank you.”

This experience was the moment I had been waiting for. I was reminded of my old self and how unwilling I had been to be helped. But I was also reminded of how far I’d come. Seeing Benjamin continue to smile and remain gracious through his suffering, as well as allowing us Tzu Chi volunteers to come to his aid, showed me what true humility was. From him, I learned two very important lessons: The first lesson I learned

was that in times of suffering, we can choose how we respond. We can choose to give up hope, but we can also try our hardest to smile through it. Admittedly, the latter is a harder feat, but if we can accomplish it, then it truly shows our strength and resilience. The second lesson was that when we help others, we should always remember to thank them for accepting our help. Serving the community is a very good deed, but allowing oneself to overcome one’s afflictions and be served is true nobility. 

Crystal Christian is a senior at Fordham University. She will graduate in the Spring of 2018 with a BA in International Humanitarian Affairs and a dual minor in Mandarin and Political Science. She is currently the President of Fordham University’s Tzu Chiing (Tzu Chi Collegiate Association) chapter.

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Atlanta, GA 30340
Tel / Fax: 770-458-1000

JING SI BOOKSTORE
DORAVILLE, GA
Tel: 770-458-1000

TZU CHI ACADEMY, ATLANTA
Tel: 770-986-8669
Fax: 770-458-1000

HAWAII
PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION
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Honolulu, HI 96816
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Fax: 808-737-8889

JING SI BOOKSTORE
HONOLULU, HI
Tel: 808-737-8885

TZU CHI ACADEMY, HAWAII
Tel: 808-737-8885
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ILLINOIS
MIDWEST REGION
1430 Plainfield Rd.
Darien, IL 60561
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Fax: 630-960-9360

JING SI BOOKS & CAFÉ
CHICAGO, IL
Tel: 630-963-6601

TZU CHI ACADEMY, CHICAGO
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INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS SERVICE CENTER
2929 E. 96th St. #E
Indianapolis, IN 46240
Tel: 317-580-0979

KANSAS
KANSAS OFFICE
9508 Shannon Way Circle
Wichita, KS 67206
Tel: 316-323-5798

LOUISIANA
NEW ORLEANS OFFICE
3300 Airline Dr.
Metairie, LA 70001
Tel: 504-782-5168
Fax: 504-832-2022

MARYLAND
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
SERVICE CENTER
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Rockville, MD 20850
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Fax: (301) 339-8872

MASSACHUSETTS
BOSTON SERVICE CENTER
15 Summer St.
Newton, MA 02464
Tel: 617-762-0569
Fax: 617-431-4484

JING SI BOOKSTORE
NEWTON, MA
Tel: 617-762-0569

TZU CHI ACADEMY, BOSTON
Tel: 617-762-0569
Fax: 617-431-4484

MICHIGAN
DETROIT SERVICE CENTER
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Sterling Heights, MI 48310
Tel / Fax: 586-795-3491

LANSING OFFICE
2001 Valley Brook Dr.
Okemos, MI 48864
Tel / Fax: 517-349-6441

MINNESOTA
MINNEAPOLIS OFFICE
1485 Arden View Drive,
Arden Hills, MN 55112
Tel: 651-493-9388

MISSOURI
ST. LOUIS SERVICE CENTER
8515 Olive Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63132
Tel / Fax: 314-994-1999

NEVADA
LAS VEGAS SERVICE CENTER
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Las Vegas, NV 89146
Tel / Fax: 702-880-5552

JING SI BOOKSTORE
LAS VEGAS, NV
Tel: 702-880-5552

RENO OFFICE
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Reno, NV 89509
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Tel: 702-880-5552

NEW JERSEY
CENTRAL NEW JERSEY SERVICE CENTER
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Edison, NJ 07733
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Fax: 973-857-8666

MID-ATLANTIC REGION
150 Commerce Rd.
Cedar Grove, NJ 07009
Tel: 973-857-8666
Fax: 973-857-9555

JING SI BOOKS & CAFÉ
NEW JERSEY
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BROOKLYN OFFICE
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Brooklyn, NY 10013
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LONG ISLAND BRANCH
60 E. Williston Ave.
East Williston, NY 11596
Tel: 516-873-6888
Fax: 516-746-0626

EAST LONG ISLAND OFFICE
4 Milburn Rd., S.
Setauket, NY 11720
Tel: 631-964-3393

JING SI BOOKSTORE
EAST WILLISTON, NY
Tel: 516-873-6888

MANHATTAN SERVICE CENTER
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New York, NY 10002
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Fax: 212-965-1152

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Flushing, NY 11354
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NEW YORK, NY
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TZU CHI ACADEMY
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Tel: 516-873-6888
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Charlotte, NC 28217
Tel: 704-281-8060
Fax: 704-943-1031

RALEIGH SERVICE CENTER
3705 Mason Road
New Hills, NC 27562
Tel: 919-448-4800
Fax: 919-363-6945

JING SI BOOKSTORE
CARY, NC
Tel: 919-439-4919

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JING SI BOOKSTORE
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Fax: 512-926-1373

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JING SI BOOKS & CAFÉ
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Tel: 972-680-8869

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SOUTHERN REGION
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Madison, WI 53715
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MILWAUKEE OFFICE
4790 Shagbark Ct.
Brookfield, WI 53005

TZU CHI

A BRIEF HISTORY...

In 1966, Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Merit Association in Hualien with the support of thirty housewives who each put aside 50 Taiwanese cents (around 2 US cents) of their grocery money every day to establish a charity fund. In the first year, they helped a total of thirty-one elderly, ill, and poor people from fifteen families. As word spread, more people participated, and the initiative gathered strength. It spread beyond Hualien: first across the island of Taiwan and then around the world.

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

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

Whenever disaster strikes at home or abroad, Tzu Chi volunteers deliver cash aid, hot meals, and emergency relief supplies directly into the hands of disaster survivors. Over the years, US Tzu Chi volunteers have actively provided relief after major disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and tornadoes. Internationally, volunteers have provided relief in earthquakes and other disasters in Haiti, Japan, Nepal, Ecuador, Mexico, and many other countries.

In recent years, Tzu Chi's charitable work has been increasingly recognized by the global community. In 2010, Tzu Chi was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and in 2013, Tzu Chi was honored as a White House Champion of Change. Dharma Master Cheng Yen has been presented with the Roosevelt Institute's FDR Distinguished Public Service Award, named to the TIME 100 list of the world's most influential people (2011), and honored with the Rotary International Award of Honor (2014).





Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

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Schoolgirls clutch Tzu Chi reusable bags, eagerly awaiting for the volunteers to distribute the food.

*Those who sow the seeds
of blessings shall harvest
plentiful blessings.*

~ Dharma Master Cheng Yen ~

