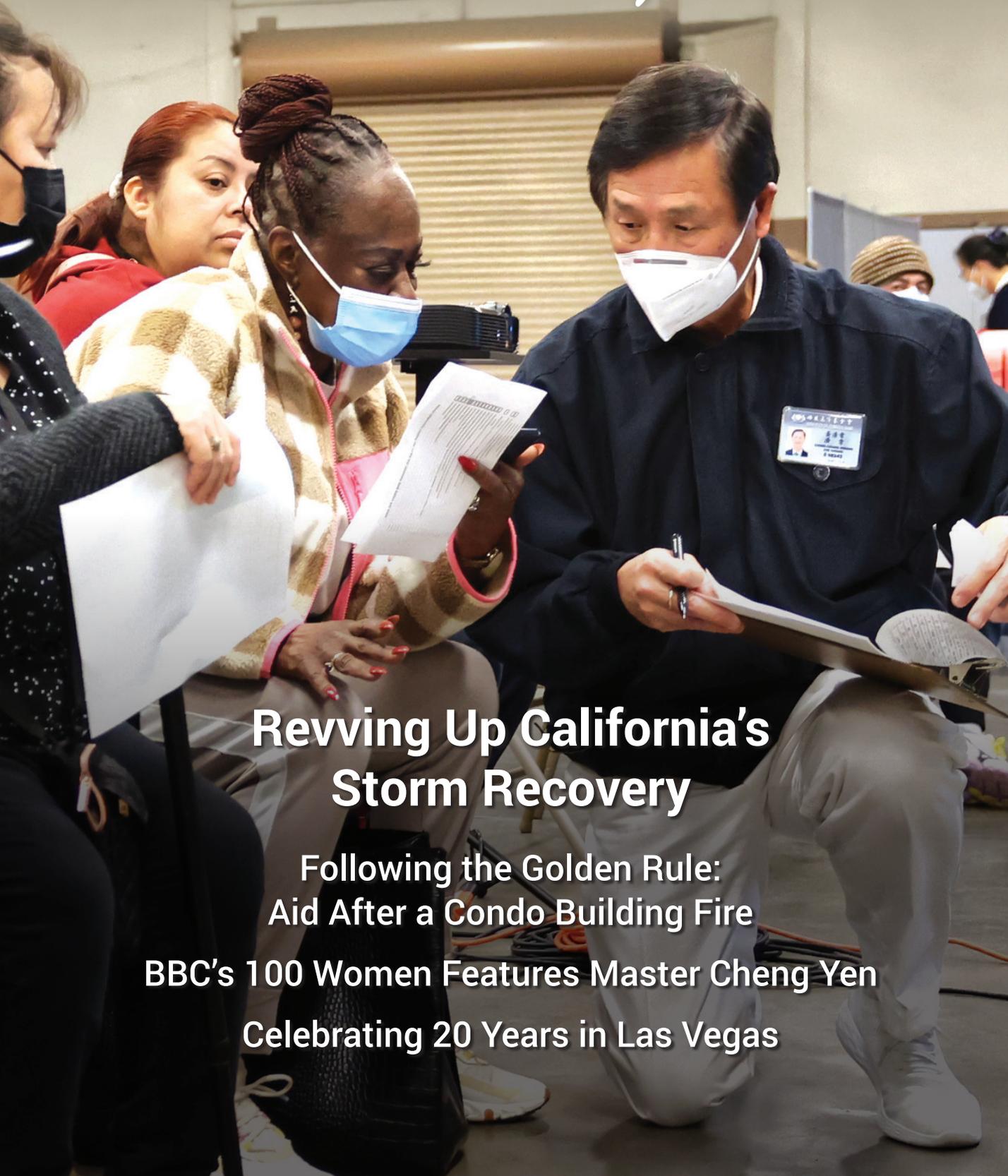


# TZU CHI *USA Journal*



## Revving Up California's Storm Recovery

Following the Golden Rule:  
Aid After a Condo Building Fire

BBC's 100 Women Features Master Cheng Yen

Celebrating 20 Years in Las Vegas



# CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM

Thoughts for meditation, contemplation,  
and reflection

**Dharma Master Cheng Yen**

*Founder of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation*

To be born human is truly rare  
so let us be clear of our direction in every minute and second  
and elevate the value of our lives.

To hear the Buddha Dharma is rare  
so let us have a clear mission in life  
and be diligent in our spiritual practice.

We must be united in harmony on the Bodhisattva Path.

Let us not give rise to resentment toward others  
nor let ourselves give rise to indolence.

Let us practice what is hard to practice and do good together.

Let us share in the same vow, lifetime after lifetime.



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By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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Translated by the Dharma as Water Team



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**Cover:** A Tzu Chi volunteer checks care recipients' information at the winter storm disaster relief distribution in Merced County, California, on February 4, 2023. *Photo/Kitty Lu*

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Coexist with the Earth

Welcome to the first issue of the Tzu Chi USA Journal in 2023. We wish everyone all the best for the new year ahead. Our Issue 68 theme revolves around the Golden Rule, which upholds the principle of treating others as we want to be treated.

The Golden Rule appears across all religions, as shown in our table on page 58. From Hinduism to Buddhism to Christianity and beyond, you'll find guidance to hold others as dear as we do ourselves and treat them accordingly.

Within a Buddhist faith-based organization such as Tzu Chi, its vision and missions embody the Golden Rule and apply it on a global scale. Concurrently, Tzu Chi emphasizes a neighborly, community activity level, expressed through its adage, "Think big and act local." Each of the stories in this issue touches on these themes.

Our cover story, "Following The Golden Rule in Peekskill: Aid After a Condo Building Fire," showcases the efforts of a Tzu Chi volunteer in Westchester County, New York, and chronicles how she took it upon herself to bring disaster aid to her neighbors after an apartment building fire reduced their homes to ash.

"A Lotus Blooms in Las Vegas: Celebrating 20 Years of Relief" brings us along on a two-decade-long journey of responsive and caring community service by volunteers from Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center.

"Cheer Abounds at Magalia's 'Moving Forward Holiday Celebration'" reveals how Tzu Chi volunteers keep care recipients close to heart even years after the disaster that first brought them together, in this case, the destructive 2018 Camp Fire in California.

Staying on the West Coast, "Survivors Not Victims: Revving Up Recovery in Storm-Battered California" presents our recent emergency relief mission serving those affected by a devastating series of winter storms that brought flooding and upheaval to the residents of Merced County.

Finally, "BBC's 100 Women of 2022 Features Dharma Master Cheng Yen" honors recent accolades for Tzu Chi's founder, who was recognized as an inspiring and influential Buddhist philanthropist, encouraging us all to participate and do our part on the path of neighborly care for one another in this world. 

by *Anik Ghose*

# A Greedy Little Bird

*“Greed not only brings misery, but also leads the way to moral ruin.”*

*-Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

**T**here was once an orchard on the outskirts of a city that was full of loquat trees that produced not just edible fruit, but also leaves used as medicine. Because of this, many people came to pick the fruit and leaves every spring when the fruit was ripe.

However, a bird in the orchard would scream loudly every time people approached the loquat trees, becoming even more fierce as they reached out to pick fruit. It seemed to be saying, “It’s all mine! It’s all mine!”

One spring, the bird was flying around the orchard and screaming as usual, but as everyone was used to it, they paid no attention and continued to pick the fruit. Later, the bird screamed so much that it eventually died.

As this was so strange, word of the bird’s death spread. A group of monastics reported the incident to the Buddha, who sighed and said, “This is the habitual tendency of greed!” The bhiksus asked the Buddha, “What is the karmic condition of this bird’s past life? Please teach us.”



The Buddha replied, “A long time ago, a young man lived in this city. His parents passed away when he was very young, leaving him many assets, including the orchard. The man was always calculating how much the orchard could produce each year, and how much interest he was not collecting.”

“Someone said to him, ‘You should get married and have a family.’ He thought about how it would be if he had a wife, and how much an additional person would consume in food each day. And if he had children, how much would that cost him? He even let go of all of the servants that his parents had hired, so getting married and having children was out of the question.”

The Buddha continued, “Life is impermanent. He grew old, and he suddenly passed away one day. Because he had no one to inherit his assets, all of them were eventually confiscated and became part of the state treasury.”

At this point, the Buddha said to his disciples, “That bird is the reincarnation of that rich man. Although he was well-to-do, he was extremely greedy and stingy. He always felt that he never had enough wealth, so he lived as if he were poor, reluctant to spend on food and clothing.”

“This bird still thought that it owned the orchard. That is why it was reluctant to let anyone pick the fruit, so it kept screaming, ‘It is all mine! It is all mine!’ until it died. Human nature is good and kind, but if one lacks the heart to do good and create blessings, one will always live a poor life.”

From this story, we can see that if one is stingy and is lacking in love, this habitual tendency will carry on to the next life. With this in mind, I hope that we can eliminate greed and stinginess and unlock the abundant resources in our hearts. 🌿





A condominium building at 3 Woods End Circle in Peekskill, Westchester County, New York, burns to the ground on January 5, 2023, but Tzu Chi's aid is not far behind. Photo/Courtesy of PeekskillHerald.com

# Following the Golden Rule in Peekskill: Aid After a Condo Building Fire

*Written by Ida Eva Zielinska*

**A**n ancient command runs through many, if not all, world religions. What is often referred to as the Golden Rule urges us to treat others how we'd want them to treat us; deters us from treating others how we wouldn't want them to treat us; and asks us to empathize, wishing for others what we hope for ourselves. [See the Golden Rule as expressed in the scriptures of several world religions on page 58.]

Tzu Chi's missions activate this spirit of universal neighborliness and empathy. For instance, our volunteers mobilize to provide relief when major disasters strike worldwide. Yet Tzu Chi's aid doesn't only arise this way: It can also materialize from a single volunteer feeling a heartfelt call to respond to emerging local needs. Those helped don't have to number in the hundreds or thousands either: They can be one person in an individual care case or a few households, as in aid following a condominium building fire in New York State in January 2023.



Mother and daughter Toni and Ashley Bizarro are relieved to get some help as they try to rebuild their lives after the fire. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

## Disaster Next Door

On the night of January 4, Ting Fan, a Tzu Chi volunteer who is also the Director of Tzu Chi USA's Culture and Communications Department, was on a plane bound for a conference on the West Coast. A long-time New York resident, Ting had just moved to Westchester County seeking the quiet of a small town, which she found in the charming City of Peekskill along the Hudson River, just 50 miles north of the bustling Big Apple.

Landing safely in Las Vegas, Ting settled in to catch some sleep, unaware that at around that time, at approximately 2:00 AM on January 5 in Peekskill, a fire had ignited in the Hillcrest Park condominium complex that she now called home. Abruptly, several of her new neighbors were in grave peril.

Toni Bizarro, who uses a nasal cannula and hose to deliver oxygen as part of therapy for a medical condition, had the shock of her life:

**I woke up with my nostril on fire. I looked down, and my nightgown was on fire. I ripped it off me and went to try to grab my cat. This whole house was going up in flames, so I had to run outside naked.**

“

**Toni Bizarro**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Toni's daughter, Ashley, intervened when her mother was looking for the cat, pushing her out of the apartment. "I didn't have time to look for clothes; her life was more important." Ashley then tried to alert her neighbors.

**I ran to the other residents and started banging on their doors. Everybody was sleeping as I was banging, screaming, 'Fire, fire!'**

“

**Ashley Bizarro**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*



Despite losing their home, Carlos Alarcon is grateful for his wife. "We have each other; that's the important thing." Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

The flames, which originated on the top floor of a two-story building at 3 Woods End Circle in the Hillcrest Park condominium community, were ferocious and spread swiftly. Nearly 100 firefighters from all over the region arrived to battle the blaze. "Heavy, heavy fire in the fire apartment, and it was already in the cockloft, in that attic area upon arrival," James Seymour, the Peekskill Fire Chief, told ABC 7 New York.

**They said, 'You need to get out!' I only had time to grab a sweatshirt. I put it on, grabbed my two little dogs. My wife took her jacket and purse, and that's all we came out with.**

““

**Carlos Alarcon**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

It was a night of terror for the residents of Hillcrest Park's Building No. 3, with various TV news teams reporting on the drama or later following up on the story. "We were very close to losing our lives, we had to

leap off the second deck," Roger Simon told News 12 Connecticut. "I literally watched it burn. Everything I own, everything I worked so hard for all my life, everything is gone," Alice Anderson told News 12 Hudson Valley.

All the commotion on that dreadful night was also rousing from their slumber the residents of other apartment buildings and townhouses in the community, including Fernando Bodon, Ting's life partner. Stepping outside their home about 200 yards from the fire site, he recorded a video and sent it with a text message to Ting, saying there was a lot of smoke, with ambulances and fire trucks all around.

"I didn't realize it's that bad because I didn't see the fire in the video; I only saw smoke," Ting divulged, explaining that she only realized the gravity of the catastrophe when watching it on television the following morning. "ABC News captured the fire scene and then the debris afterward, as they demolished the entire building right away."



Firefighters find low water pressure at the site, which forces them to stretch over 1,000 feet of hose across a neighboring highway to bring in more water, but the blaze rages beyond control. Photo/Courtesy of PeekskillHerald.com

Despite the firefighters' valiant efforts, the inferno had reduced Building No. 3 to smoldering rubble and ash, and 25 people, including a 10-year-old child, were suddenly without a home. The only upside to the tragedy was that everyone survived.

**That's the only good thing that came out of this. Because even though we lost everything, we didn't lose anyone.**

“

**Ashley Bizzarro**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Although some, including Ashley's mother Toni, lost beloved pets. She also suffered burns that required hospitalization. As for Ting, for whom this was the first time a disaster had struck so close to home, yards literally, she was ready to spring into action.

**When I watched the ABC News and the News 12 footage, how the building was gone, immediately I was, 'Oh, how can I help?' I've been to so many disaster zones. I was like, 'Oh, then where are the people?'**

“

**Ting Fan**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*



Within hours, what was once a building with 16 units, is just a memory for the unfortunate residents. Photo/Courtesy of PeekskillHerald.com

## Activating Good Intentions Isn't Always Easy

Ting learned that the American Red Cross had already set up a shelter for the displaced Hillcrest Park residents, and the City of Peekskill was helping them too. The community at large rallied around the survivors, and the Salvation Army



Major Rickie Armour gives food to the fire survivors who come to the Salvation Army's Peekskill Corps Community Center. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

of Peekskill was assisting. Major Rickie Armour, a Salvation Army Officer, personally visited the disaster site to determine the extent of needs.

**I wanted to see, to get a better perspective of what's happening. I could tell that the need was real, and the need was great. So far, we've been offering them food. We have a food pantry here. We also serve lunch. And we're also gathering money so we can help them even further.**

**Major Rickie Armour**  
*Salvation Army Officer*

“

The path ahead was clear in Ting's mind – at least in terms of intention. “I just came back from Hurricane Ian [disaster relief]; it's like a thousand miles away. If I could help Hurricane Ian survivors, feel people far away, their suffering, how could I not do something for my neighbors?”

The residents of the 16 units that burned down were most definitely displaced, spread across the Red Cross shelter and elsewhere, which Ting knew from her extensive disaster relief experience – “hotels, relatives, friends' houses, some people will stay in their car. That blew my mind, ‘Oh my God, think about if I were them.’”

Ting knew that according to Tzu Chi's disaster relief protocol, the assessment phase, during which “you need to identify how bad the disaster was and how many people got affected,” was already complete. Moreover, she expected the next step, getting a list of households, would be simple. “I thought it would be easy because I'm a resident.” Unfortunately, that would not be the case.

Contacting the community board composed of Hillcrest Park residents, Ting introduced Tzu Chi and stated its intentions to provide disaster relief. “I received the response,

“Who are you?” she recounts, to which she replied, “Oh, I’m your neighbor.” Yet that didn’t facilitate getting any list. Since few people know about the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, hearing about it for the first time, they can react with suspicion.

**No matter how big the disaster, the beginning is always tough. I experienced that a lot but never thought it would happen in my home, in my neighborhood. [And] I never really need to deal with this myself, right? I always leave it to the local volunteers to deal with it. So now, I’m the local volunteer. I have to face these challenges, and even though it’s a small disaster, only 16 households, it’s still very difficult.**



**Ting Fan**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*

“But you know me, I never give up,” Ting announced, describing how she gave the board plenty of videos, articles, and blogs about Tzu Chi USA and its activities. After reviewing the material, they asked about Master Cheng Yen, saying, “I want to talk to the nun. Is she still alive? Where is she?” Learning she is in Taiwan, they asked about Stephen Huang, who was instrumental in establishing Tzu Chi USA. Patiently, Ting countered with, “You probably don’t need to talk to him or Master Cheng Yen, as we have a local chapter in New York City; you can talk to the Executive Director, Freeman Su.”

Satisfied and discovering that Tzu Chi USA works in collaboration with the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, they asked if this was possible in Peekskill, which it certainly was. The board indicated they would relay Ting’s offer of Tzu Chi’s help to the Salvation Army. A day passed, and no one had contacted her.

**I was really frustrated because it was almost four days after the fire. I can’t imagine the families’ situation. They lost everything. They might need money to buy things. They might have lost their credit cards. They need, they need cash. So that somehow motivated me, don’t give up.**



**Ting Fan**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*

Taking matters into her own hands, Ting searched and uncovered that Major Rickie Armour was the person to contact, found the Facebook page for the Salvation Army’s Peekskill Corps, and sent a message. It turns out that the page manager is Rickie Armour’s wife, and by the next day, he called. “I was so blessed,” Ting exclaimed, “I almost cried because he was very understanding. He was amazed by what we do.”

Noticing that Tzu Chi and the Salvation Army had worked side by side at Ground Zero after 911 created an instant bond, “I was at 911 as well,” Major Armour shared. “You said you worked with the Salvation Army in other countries,” he added, “so I didn’t have any doubt that you were legit at all.” However, he understood Ting’s frustrations about Tzu Chi’s lack of recognition, acknowledging how longevity plays a part: “The Salvation Army has been around for a long time, since 1865.” Ting’s sense of relief was immense, “everything started to be very smooth after I finally got in touch with Major Armour.”

As for the abruptly homeless residents of Hillcrest Park’s Building No. 3, many were facing their own challenges. “First, we were a little lost. We didn’t know the steps to take. We tried to search in the media.



San San Chiang (right) and fellow Tzu Chi New York volunteers are ready to spring into action when disaster strikes in their region, as they did in Peekskill, distributing cash cards and blankets. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

We tried to call insurance companies,” Carlos Alarcon explains. Others, like Toni Bizzarro, confronted different issues, “I lost everything, and I don’t have renters’ insurance, so I can’t get anything back.”

Meanwhile, Tzu Chi New York volunteers were poised to provide disaster relief. “When we heard the news from our volunteer sister Ting Fan, we were eager to do something for the [disaster-affected] residents of this serene town,” volunteer San San Chiang relayed. Since they were already getting help with food and clothing, “what they need most is our distribution of emergency relief, giving them timely cash cards,” she said.

Major Armour confirmed that fact, elaborating that even their aid going forward would be fund-based. “We have a link where people can donate. That’s how we’re going to help the people in need because they really don’t need clothes, old clothes, or stuff like that. People were telling me they need furniture, they need utilities turned on, and they need apartments, they

need a place to live. So, in order for them to obtain these things, they need help from the community. And we’ll help.”

Ting planned to provide \$1,000 per household immediately, and Major Armour offered Tzu Chi the use of the Salvation Army Peekskill Corps Community Center for the distribution. Alas, then another demanding task appeared: Getting the word out and encouraging people to register for Tzu Chi USA’s disaster aid.

### Gaining the Public’s Trust Is Another Challenge

Ting found a popular local Instagram account, *@peekskill\_exurbanist*, and a Facebook group, *Hillcrest Fire – Peekskill Community Support*, where the Tzu Chi USA media team and Major Armour posted about the upcoming distribution. Unfortunately, people’s response was slow. Ting confided, “Major Armour got more phone calls than I did because people trust the Salvation Army, so all the phone calls went [there].”

Given the situation, Major Armour did his best to facilitate contact. “He’d say, ‘Hey, this family called me,’” Ting narrated, “and even on the Martin Luther Day holiday, he still went back to the office to get me the phone numbers and asked me to reach out to the families.” Nonetheless, she pushed back the initially planned distribution date so there was more time to talk to people, although gaining the public’s trust was no easy matter.

“People don’t trust, and I kind of understand why because nowadays there are so many scammers, every day, scam calls, they try to get your information through things,” Ting acknowledged, “so thank God that we have social media, we have our Tzu Chi USA website, I have videos to show, and we have our partners’ testimonials that we’re really helping people.” Thus, she persevered.

Gradually, through everyone’s concerted effort, 19 individuals from 13 households registered, and the disaster relief distribution was set for January 19, two weeks after the fire had turned their lives upside down. For Ting, it was an opportunity to activate her philosophy and that of every Tzu Chi volunteer.

**It was a small group of people, but each person, their life, their situation, is worth attention, right? We don’t help a hundred people and ignore ten. So, no matter if it’s big or small, I think Tzu Chi has the same goal and intention to help each individual.**

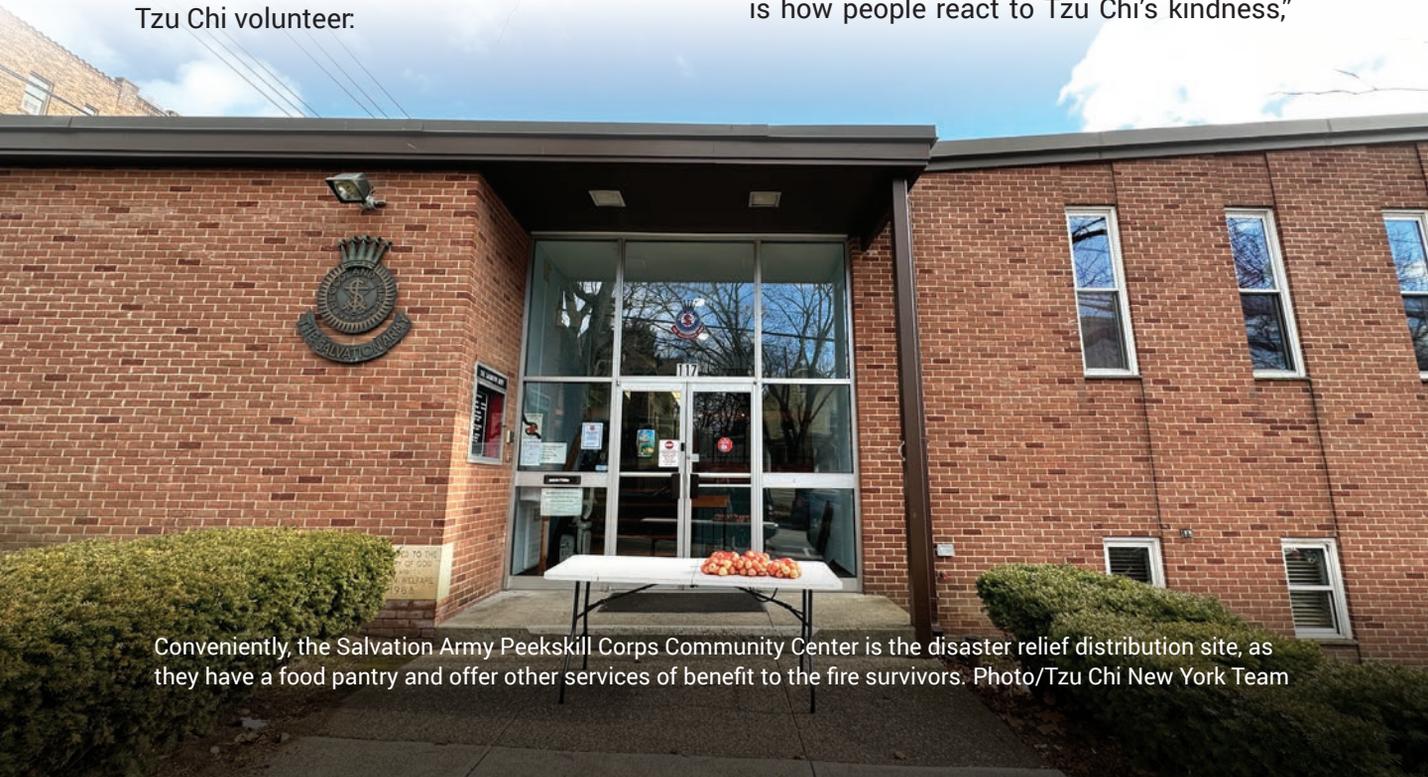
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**Ting Fan**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*

## Surprise and Relief

Each household that registered received a debit card loaded with \$1,000, an amount of great surprise to many. Ting described their reaction, saying, “A lot of people, when we told them, ‘This is a \$1,000 cash card,’ thought they heard you wrong. ‘Huh?’ And when San San or I repeated, ‘It’s \$1,000,’ they would cry right away because they needed it so much.” She remembers one highly emotional care recipient who choked up, “He just kept saying, ‘I will pay it back,’ you know, ‘pay it forward.’”

Such responses and an eagerness to give back are not uncommon during Tzu Chi’s disaster relief missions worldwide. “That is how people react to Tzu Chi’s kindness,”



Conveniently, the Salvation Army Peekskill Corps Community Center is the disaster relief distribution site, as they have a food pantry and offer other services of benefit to the fire survivors. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team



Offering Tzu Chi bamboo banks, which encourage giving to help others in their time of need, is part of Tzu Chi's global disaster relief protocol. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

Ting reflected. However, she had never personally initiated a disaster relief operation before, and one right next door to her home. "This time, it's different for me. They're friends, they're family, they're neighbors, you know, they're part of my life here."

Carlos Alarcon expressed his thanks, saying, "Everyone has been kind. With time and patience, we'll move forward." Toni Bizzarro, who has no insurance to fall back on, murmured, "I feel blessed." Even those less vulnerable than Toni felt immensely grateful. "This is not a poor community. People have jobs. They have a regular income. But a disaster could happen to anyone," Ting pointed out, so they still need attention and help to get their life back on track.

Roger Simon arrived at the distribution with his fiancée, Lauren Wellens, who was still visibly shell-shocked by the trauma of that night. They both conveyed their appreciation for Tzu Chi's assistance.

**It's like a weight off our shoulders that a Foundation that we didn't even know about cared about people like us, so we were extremely, extremely happy about it. You're like family to us now; you'll be with us for life.**

“

**Roger Simon**  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient

**I feel the love right now, you know?**

“

**Lauren Wellens**  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient

After the distribution, Ting posted a thank you message on the *Hillcrest Fire – Peekskill Community Support* Facebook page, writing, "Fernando and I were glad to meet our neighbors today! Many blessings to all that could make the time to receive the cash cards from Tzu Chi USA. Thank you to the Peekskill Salvation Army and Salvationist Major Rickie Armour, who graciously allowed us to use their facility to host the cash card distribution. We wish everyone the best of luck moving forward."

Ting and Fernando felt deeply moved by Roger Simon's posted response: "Both of you are the most selfless, caring, and kindest people I've ever known. This world is a better place with people like you both! Even if Tzu Chi USA didn't distribute cash cards, I would still be eternally grateful for all your kind words that helped tremendously ease the pain and anxiety of this terrible ordeal. I only wish we would have known you before this tragic day. Thanks again with all our hearts."

Roger had never imagined being in a position of need before, and the novel experience of receiving help was eye-opening. "I've never felt like this in my life, you know," he told Ting in an interview. Roger later disclosed more off-camera, saying that the distribution had changed him. "Receiving the help changed his point of view on life," Ting recounted, "He said, 'From today, I'm a new person.'" Ting herself was truly touched hearing this about Tzu Chi's help. "When they know that

a stranger gives them \$1,000 and asks nothing in return, I think that's the moment that changes your life."

Major Rickie Armour actively participated in the distribution alongside Tzu Chi volunteers. He greeted care recipients as they arrived, assuring them things would get better. He also took advantage of the event on the Salvation Army premises to serve and give out food, provide counseling, and "we also had prayer with a couple of the people that came as well," he added.

As for the Salvation Army's partnership with Tzu Chi, Major Armour was thrilled, saying, "I'm so excited about this thing right now. I got the first hand and saw what you actually do. You guys do an amazing job. And so, for us to come together with you, we're honored to work with you. We're going to keep the ball rolling." The two organizations' collaboration on site was genuinely grounded in universal fellowship and love.



Roger Simon, who came to the distribution with his fiancée, Lauren Wellens, feels profoundly changed by the experience of receiving help from people he didn't even know before. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team



Lauren Wellens reaches to hug a fellow fire survivor, hoping to soothe her anxiety in their mutually uncertain current situation. Photo/Tzu Chi New York Team

You know, we come from our hearts. I have a heart for God, and I have a heart for people, and I don't like to see people struggling because there's no need. If we come together the way God intended us to be, this comes from love. Heart to God, and hand to Man. So, this is who we are as the Salvation Army.



*Major Rickie Armour  
Salvation Army Officer*

### Loving Their Neighbors as Themselves

One could say that the entire community came together to follow the Golden Rule in Peekskill after the fire disaster of January 5, 2023. Perhaps Jenna Reilly, one of the residents of the decimated building who received Tzu Chi's care, summed it up best:

**It's absolutely amazing what the community has done, I mean, Ting being a neighbor of Hillcrest Park, to get this**

all organized for the neighbors. We've also all been in contact with one another, trying to look out for one another and stay in touch. And the community of Peekskill, the businesses of Peekskill, and everyone has really been supportive, and it's making it better. You know, it's not easy what we all went through, but having the community's support is definitely uplifting and helping us move forward.



*Jenna Reilly  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient*



MORE HELP MADE AVAILABLE FOR VICTIMS OF PEEKSKILL CONDOMINIUM FIRE

Ting Fan works alongside the Tzu Chi team during the distribution. Photo/News 12 Connecticut Screenshot

Through her job as Manager of the Peekskill Coffee House, a popular establishment in the center of town, Jenna could equally do her part to help by gathering supplies and donations for her fellow disaster-stricken neighbors. As for Ting and Major Armour, they're already planning ahead.

**You've helped them with a \$1,000 gift card; that's really unheard of. We look forward to continuing what you've done, and we're going to stay with this until every one of these people is in a home.**

““

**Major Rickie Armour**  
Salvation Army Officer

“I'm really happy that I made it happen, you know,” Ting concluded after having launched and successfully executed this disaster relief mission. Still, long-term relief, which could extend to a few years, was already on her mind and in her heart. Moreover, she anticipates it will flow smoothly thanks to

the closeness that blossomed during the past few weeks between herself and the care recipients, which will facilitate future communications.

**They text me like a friend. That's why I feel it will be easier for me to keep tracking. Once in a while, I'll send them a message, 'Hey, are you alright? Did you find a place to stay? What's the situation?' Yeah, so I think the story is not over. I think it will continue.**

““

**Ting Fan**  
Tzu Chi Volunteer

And that's how it is not only in Peekskill, New York, in the United States but in places around the globe. Once Tzu Chi provides aid, remarkable developments can follow, benefiting others in need and forging a sense of neighborly fellowship that only deepens with time. 🌱



Ting Fan attentively drapes a Tzu Chi eco-scarf around a care recipient's neck, hoping Tzu Chi's aid brought comfort and boosted her morale on the long road to recovery after the Hillcrest Park fire disaster. Photo/ Tzu Chi New York Team

# Survivors Not Victims: Revving Up Recovery in Storm-Battered California

Written by Ida Eva Zielinska



A little girl presses her hands together in prayer during the ceremony at Tzu Chi's disaster relief distribution in Merced County, California, on February 4, 2023, her parents and other care recipients weary and yearning for better days ahead.

Photo/Kitty Lu

Families return to destruction inside their homes, forcing them to discard damaged property and begin extensive renovations. Photo/Kitty Lu

**I had never been in this situation before. I'd see it on TV but it hits you a lot differently when it hits you at home.**

“

**Cynthia Hope Andrade**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Two days after Christmas 2022, on December 27, a series of winter storms unleashed across California that would extend through much of January, bringing misery instead of the fulfillment of hopes and wishes for a terrific start to the New Year 2023. For a state more accustomed to wildfire or drought-related disasters and the ever-present anxiety about an elevated magnitude earthquake catastrophe, dealing with widespread winter storms of such intensity is a relatively new experience.

**It didn't happen as severely before. The scale is beyond what we've seen before. Now it's more than fire; it's flooding in California.**

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**Minjing Hsieh**  
*Executive Director  
Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region*

The sustained force and longevity of several atmospheric water systems responsible for the storms brought a plethora of dangerous and potentially deadly weather conditions, including heavy snowfall, torrential rain, and hurricane-force winds with multiple cumulative and compounding effects such as landslides, mudslides, failed levees, high flows and flooding along rivers and streams, urban flooding, debris flows, power outages, toppled trees, and more.





Mercedes Perez takes a photo of her street as it floods on January 9, 2023. Shortly after, the single mother flees home with her kids. Photo/Mercedes Perez



Mercedes Perez's oldest child, who is autistic, settles in at the Red Cross shelter after the family evacuates on the night of the flooding. Photo/Mercedes Perez

On January 8, California Governor Gavin Newsom requested President Joseph Biden to issue an Emergency Declaration for the State of California, which he did on January 14, making federal funding available to affected individuals in the counties of Merced, Sacramento, and Santa Cruz. The White House then added the counties of Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara on the 18th.

During this prolonged, brutal storm crisis, the National Weather Service issued flood watches for roughly 90% of the state's population. Government authorities placed over 96,000 people under evacuation orders or warnings at some point. Tragically, by January 18, the LA Times reported that California counties confirmed 22 had died. Thankfully many others managed to escape inundated homes and roadways on their own or with the help of water rescue task forces, family members, neighbors, or good Samaritans.

The residents of Merced County in the San Joaquin Valley suffered some of the most horrendous flood conditions. By mid-January, over 200 times the amount of rainfall compared to that month in 2022 had battered the County. Planada, a small census-designated farming community with a population of around 4,000, was among the hardest-hit areas, with hundreds evacuated after a recurrence of heavy downpours on January 9, a treacherous day many residents won't soon forget.

### Escape and Rescue

The survivors' stories reverberate in shock and near disbelief that this happened to them as they recount the moments they decided to flee, then their narrow escapes and rescues. For Mercedes Perez, a single mother with three children, a seven-year-old daughter, and two sons, one age 12 and the youngest four – both boys on the autistic spectrum – the sense of danger dawned slowly.

I remember hearing water, and when I looked outside the window, I saw that water was rising up. All I know is I had to move my most important things up, and by then, the water was already rising to our stomach [level], and that's when I knew it was time to go. I knew I had to hold on to my kids, and as I opened the door, the water started coming in. As I was walking, the water [was moving], I had my baby, my seven-year-old, and my oldest, and we were all holding each other... someone ended up coming and rescuing us.

*Mercedes Perez  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Cynthia Hope Andrade also had to escape after first trying to divert the flow of rising water away from the interior of her home.

I was trying with a broom, trying to push a lot of water out, but it kept coming back. When it rained the second time, it was so hard, the water had nowhere to go [and] just kept coming in, so we grabbed our dogs and what we could, and we barely made it out, but we made it out alive.

*Cynthia Hope Andrade  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient*



Although they lost so much materially, Cynthia Hope Andrade is grateful she and her husband escaped the flood waters with their lives. Photo/ Kitty Lu



Fabi Cervantes shares her story in front of her mother's home, which sustained severe damage along with her own. Photo/Kitty Lu

Fabi Cervantes, who would soon emerge as a powerful force helping people cope and recover, was also affected by flooding after two levees near her home broke.

**It was raining very hard, and I happened to look outside my door, and I saw water coming around the corner into the front of my street, and I had a bad feeling. We barely made it out in [my husband's] truck. The water was moving pretty swiftly. It was taking over the cars. And I could see people behind me; their cars were floating already. People were being rescued in boats, the search and rescue team came out, the Sheriff's department, we were all taken out in a very short period of time. Those who refused to leave because they thought they could save their homes were forced to evacuate because we were underwater.**

***Fabi Cervantes***

*Volunteer Community Leader  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient*



Many reported a lack of prior notice of impending danger, "I thought in a disaster they would go with the loudspeaker, someone warning people," Cynthia bemoaned. Fabi experienced the same, "We didn't get any notifications that water was going to take over our little town of Planada. I couldn't get my mother out from next door because the water was already in her house. They had to carry her through all the water, which was rushing fast, pushed by force."

"I was rescued at 2:30 in the morning by a fireman, and he carried me out from my house on his back," Susan Devine, another Planada resident, narrated, noting that arriving at a shelter, it was clear that even the Red Cross was unprepared, with needs surpassing capacity. "They were caught off guard just like everybody else, and the room was filled with cots and blankets, and it was all full, so we were forced to sit at tables, being wet and everything, and they only had water," she recalls, relieved that her daughter came to get her at 6:30 and took her back to her house.

## Loss and Trauma

The last time Merced County experienced flooding was in 1997, so this winter storm catastrophe was an unexpected shock, to say the least. For those impacted, there was the trauma to contend with, then an overwhelming sense of loss when they returned home and saw all the water-inflicted damage. “When we came back Friday night, it seemed like a tornado had just hit inside the home, and a lot of memories were underwater; it was just horrific,” Fabi Cervantes recounted.

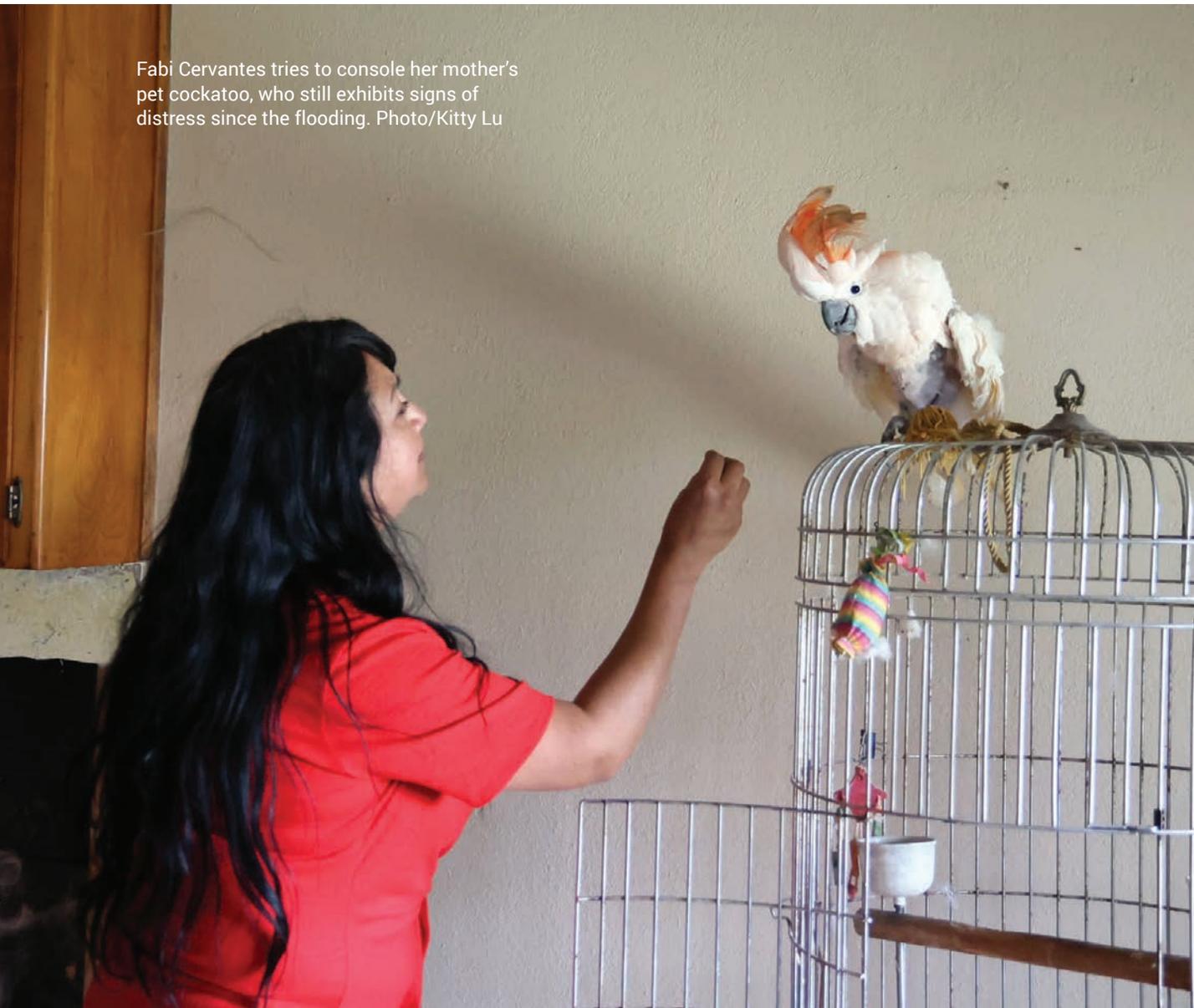
**Planada was underwater, and we’d never experienced anything like this. That’s why a lot of us are still suffering from post-traumatic syndrome because we weren’t prepared. Some of us had to leave our pets behind, come back in two days to pick them up, and see if they were still alive, and that was very heartbreaking because we didn’t know what to expect.**



***Fabi Cervantes***

*Volunteer Community Leader  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Fabi Cervantes tries to console her mother’s pet cockatoo, who still exhibits signs of distress since the flooding. Photo/Kitty Lu





Mercedes Perez keeps up a brave face in front of her children not to further traumatize them after surviving the disaster. Photo/Kitty Lu

Mercedes Perez revealed that the disaster experience had left a mark on her kids. “Whenever my daughter hears rain, she thinks it’s going to flood again, and I have to make sure that she feels safe.” To boost the little girl’s confidence, she’ll explain, “We already went through it the first time; we can make it again,” although the mother quietly harbored her own worries. “What was going through my mind was, ‘How am I going to get everything back again?’” Mercedes divulged.

“I came home to big devastation, big devastation,” Susan Devine explained, yet cleaning up the mess was just one layer of what all the survivors faced. Fabi spoke of the mold after the flood water receded and the smell, “Our water was mixed with sewer water. A lot of us still don’t feel safe drinking water from the water faucet. We’re getting donations of water.” As a volunteer community leader with Planada in Action,

a group of residents, this combination of needs motivated Fabi to start a hub at the center of town in Planada’s community center, from where to offer a variety of aid.

Concurrently, several government agencies were also already mounting disaster relief. The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) set up a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in Merced, the County seat, just a nine-mile distance from Planada.

**We provide financial assistance for those individuals who have had any damage. When we can’t provide any assistance, we refer them to organizations that can help them with their recovery efforts. When FEMA is done in the state, then the voluntary organizations are the ones who help them in their long-term recovery efforts.**

**Maria Figueroa**  
Public Information Officer  
FEMA





Minjhing Hsieh, Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region Executive Director, tells FEMA Public Information Officer Maria Figueroa about the red envelopes each care recipient would receive, carrying Master Cheng Yen's blessings. Photo/C. M. Yung



The Disaster Recovery-Center set up by FEMA at the Merced County Fairgrounds is ready to welcome the winter storm survivors. Photo/Kitty Lu

“The Office of Emergency Services in California State, OES, contacted us to invite us to join this DRC set up by FEMA,” Minjhing Hsieh, Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region, explained. Over the years, Tzu Chi volunteers from Modesto and Fresno provided isolated wildfire relief in the general area, but further northeast of Merced County, closer to Yosemite National Park. Thus, the upcoming large-scale flood relief operation here would be a first for the Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region team. “It’s the beginning of new opportunities to serve more people here,” Hsieh declared.

Moreover, compared to the team’s last flood relief activities in Northern California, following the historic flooding in Silicon Valley in February 2017, the needs of this

mission were quite challenging. They could remain so in the long run.

**The 2017 flood was concentrated in the San Jose area only, but this time, it’s very widespread. Actually, entire California is affected this time. It’s very difficult to make a disaster assessment because it’s such a wide area. We have to listen to the news; we have to talk to the counties and the state agencies to find the places we should focus on, visit, and make a more thorough assessment. So, it’s very difficult to prioritize.**

***Minjhing Hsieh***

*Executive Director  
Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region*



Merced County is home to many low-income residents who subsist from seasonal farming, so the disaster recovery here will be slow. Photo/Kitty Lu



Merced County winter storm survivors arrive at the FEMA Disaster Relief Center for Tzu Chi USA's cash card distribution on February 4, 2023. Photo/C. M. Yung

## Locals Band Together to Help

Even before Tzu Chi's first disaster relief distribution at the FEMA DRF, scheduled for February 4, the Merced County government and Planada in Action resident group had been doing their part to help those impacted. The Planada in Action team has been there from the beginning, from that terrifying night of January 9 when so many residents evacuated, operating from their hub in the middle of town.

**We've been receiving donations, people picking up water, picking up cleaning supplies this week, blankets, toiletries. It became the center hub for everybody to come and pick up hot meals because a lot of people lost their appliances, so now people have a warm meal. They can take a hot meal home, as many as they want, and in the meanwhile, their houses are being worked on.**



**Fabi Cervantes**  
Volunteer Community Leader  
Tzu Chi Care Recipient

The Merced County government was also on the frontline of assistance, bringing a well-informed understanding of the ongoing needs in the area and those related to the current crisis.

**Merced County is a majority agricultural area. You know, dairies, almonds, so it's all low-income, undocumented farmworkers that take care of all the labor here. That's why it's so hard. It might take us a little bit longer to recover. We're doing our best to help, provide the resources with FEMA and other organizations, hopefully, let's say, make it better for the communities.**



**Rodrigo Espinoza**  
District One Supervisor  
Merced County

Another pressing issue for many here after being displaced is housing. "Right now, they have us in a temporary place until the 28th, and whether we have a place or not, we have to leave. Everybody that lives there has to



A young family receives a cash card, finances that will help them recover after the flooding in this underprivileged agricultural area. Photo/Kitty Lu

leave that day. And that’s scary because we don’t know what we’re going to do,” Planada resident Cynthia Hope Andrade disclosed woefully. However, she and her husband will eventually be able to return to her uncle’s property once they complete repairs. For others, the road ahead is less clear and more fraught with obstacles.

**Housing is very difficult to obtain. Before the disaster, there were hardly any rental locations available. Unfortunately, a lot of the community are renters. Some of them won’t be able to go back. Some [landlords] don’t want to fix their houses right away. There are delays with insurance, with being able to remodel their homes. And so, you know, it’s harder on people.**

*Rodrigo Espinoza  
District One Supervisor  
Merced County*



In such a precarious situation, the cash cards Tzu Chi USA was about to provide could feel like a gift from heaven, and one wrapped in love.

### Love Almighty

On February 4, a team of 43 Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region volunteers traveled to the DRC set up by FEMA in Yosemite Hall at the Merced County Fairgrounds to participate in Tzu Chi’s first disaster relief distribution for the January 2023 winter storms. For many, it was their first time visiting and serving in this County.

**When volunteers go to a place for the first time, they feel very inspirational being able to provide direct assistance to people in a very timely manner. That’s a very great experience for volunteers.**

*Minjhing Hsieh  
Executive Director  
Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region*





The Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region volunteer team unloads blankets and other supplies after arriving at the FEMA Disaster Relief Center in Merced County on February 4, 2023. Photo/C. M. Yung



Tzu Chi volunteers review registrations, preparing to serve storm survivors who will arrive shortly. Photo/Kitty Lu



A Tzu Chi volunteer hugs care recipient Susan Devine; this simple act of human connection fosters emotional healing. Photo/C. M. Yung



Merced County employees also came to help, some volunteering to assist with Spanish translation or to guide people through the protocol at the DRC.

As for Tzu Chi volunteers, they were bringing more than merely financial assistance. The team was also there to offer moral support through a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, or an ever-ready warm hug.

**I've been hugged, and held, and that is very important for all of us to do to one another, and that will get me through, you know?**

**Susan Devine**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

**"They were very compassionate, very caring, very natural. They were showing their love naturally. And they just conversed with me, made me feel, you know, not scared anymore because I've been doing a lot of crying, because I'm, I'm just like that. I don't know how to thank everybody enough."**

**Cynthia Hope Andrade**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*



Receiving Tzu Chi's aid was a novel experience for this community, and they were taken aback by the ceremony during the event. "I didn't know what to expect when I got here, and this was beautiful," Fabi Cervantes told the volunteers. "The



Merced County employee Nancy Diaz volunteers to translate for Spanish-speaking care recipients, sharing, "They're very emotional and grateful to [Tzu Chi] for helping." Photo/Kitty Lu

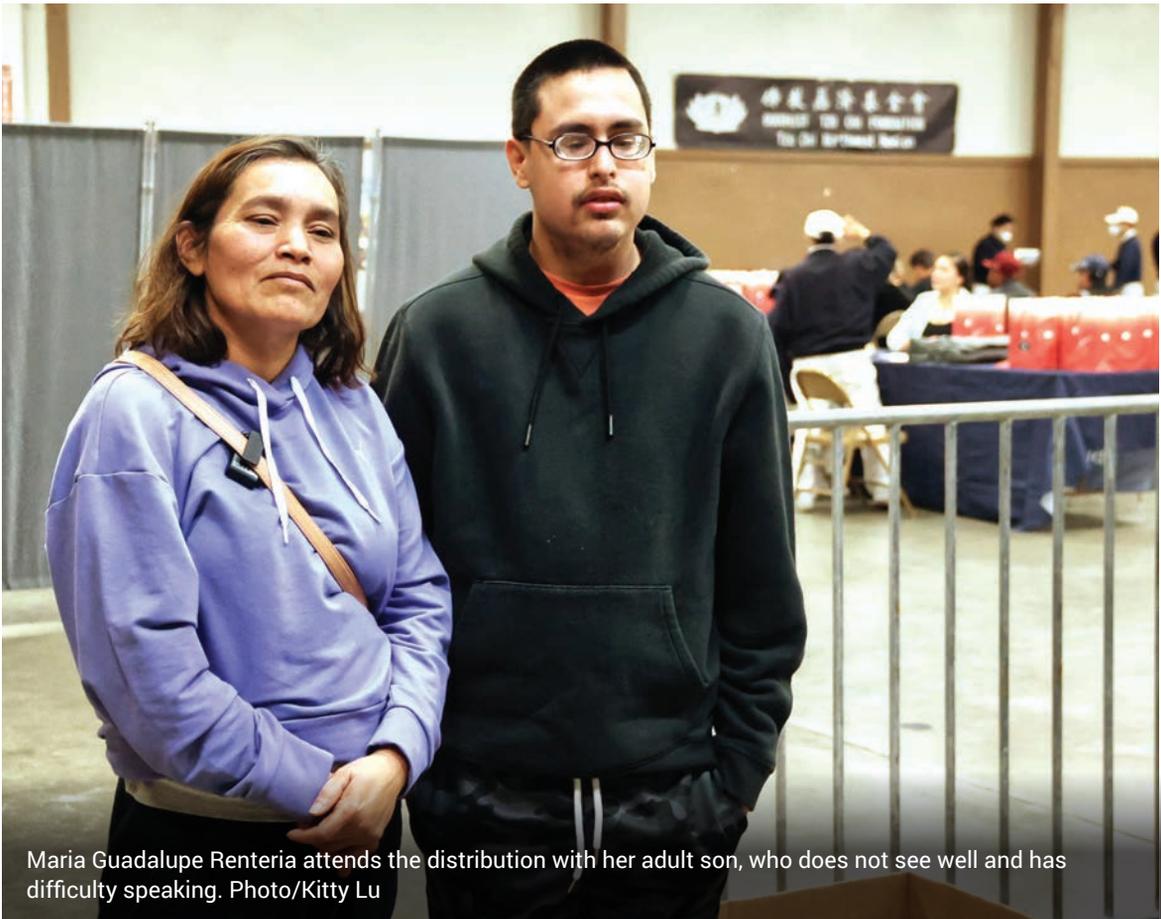
ceremony was very heartfelt. It was very emotional for me, especially when the song came up," she shared, referring to the song that Tzu Chi volunteers often play along with a sign language performance, with lyrics such as, "Bless us all with joy and hope. Love and care for each one in this world." Others expressed a similar sentiment about the message the volunteers were conveying.

**You were singing and doing the gestures with your hands, and my eyes welled up with tears. I felt it. I genuinely felt the compassion. I felt the eagerness that you want to really help and that came across as sincere to me. I enjoyed it.**

“

**Maria Figueroa**  
Public Information Officer  
FEMA

During the day, Tzu Chi USA provided \$94,000 in cash cards, benefiting 135 qualifying households, either renters or homeowners whose primary residence was destroyed or severely damaged by the storms. Maria Guadalupe Renteria came with her oldest child, a 22-year-old son with special needs.



Maria Guadalupe Renteria attends the distribution with her adult son, who does not see well and has difficulty speaking. Photo/Kitty Lu

**He has an intellectual disability. And I have three younger ones. I'm so thankful because we lost everything. We're seven in the family, and this is a lot for us. I'm very grateful for all the help.**



**Maria Guadalupe Renteria**  
*Tzu Chi Care Recipient*

Many were already planning how they would spend the financial help. “One thing I’m going to buy is my couches that I lost in the flood; my kids love the couches,” Mercedes Perez declared joyfully, also adding that “I know my kids are going to be super happy because whatever they lost of toys, or you know, anything, [this] is going to help.”

Cynthia Hope Andrade and her husband, who had no place to live yet, had different plans. “We might just save the money till we know when we’ll get to move in. Because we lost our beds, refrigerator, stove, my washer and dryer got messed up, a lot of our stuff.” And Fabi, who had been so busy taking care of others in the community that she had put her own needs aside, immediately thought of essential transportation, “I’m going to use it to fix my car, which was flooded. I’m truly, truly very thankful.”

The community leaders helping the residents of Planada and Merced cope with the aftermath of the disastrous storms were equally grateful for Tzu Chi’s assistance, fully aware of the long and challenging road to full recovery the people here are facing.

**I think people can feel it in their hearts when they see that people are helping. Sometimes it feels hopeless, right? But with the support and the compassion of the [Buddhist] Tzu Chi Foundation and others, even though it doesn't make them whole, I think they feel a lot better, and I think the community will recover faster.**

“

**Rodrigo Espinoza**  
*District One Supervisor  
Merced County*

When addressing those assembled at the distribution, Fabi called for solidarity, saying, “I’m hoping our community stays together; we continue working together. We’re a small community; we can do this. We can surpass what happened.” She also thanked Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region’s Executive Director Minjhing Hsien, “He didn’t have to come to Planada. He didn’t, but he came because he cares and this is the way he’s showing his compassion.”

## The Road Ahead

Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region volunteers returned to Yosemite Hall at the Merced County Fairgrounds the week after, on February 11, for a second disaster relief distribution. ABC30 Action News reported on the event, which Matthew Serratto, the City of Merced Mayor, attended and where he stated about Tzu Chi, “They’re not just providing monetary relief, but they’re also providing compassion, providing love, that’s a big part of their mission.”

For Mayor Serratto, the emergency disaster response phase is over, “getting people out of their homes, getting people to safety,” which required the rescue of about 400 Merced County residents in one single night. “No injuries, no fatalities, no loss of life, so we’re really proud of that,” he announced, “but now begins the hard recovery phase.”



Rodrigo Espinoza, Merced County District One Supervisor, speaks to the community, relieved that Tzu Chi’s aid can help boost morale and recovery. Photo/C. M. Yung



A mother and daughter leave the distribution smiling, bringing a cash card, eco-blankets, and one of the gift bags lovingly prepared beforehand by Tzu Chi volunteers. Photo/C. M. Yung

Serratto acknowledged the contribution of residents, “cleaning up their neighborhoods, cleaning their storm drains, cleaning out their garages and houses,” and of government, “all different branches, state, federal, city, county all coming together to try to help people.” “We’ve had a lot of volunteer efforts as well,” he said, “so many people doing big things and stepping up to help each other in this time of need.”

The Mayor also communicated Merced County’s gratitude for nonprofits and foundations such as Tzu Chi, for being “very generous, coming out here, being here at the fairgrounds, offering all kinds of people support, financial assistance, other things as well, and just bringing a lot of love and comfort to folks.” Serratto was thankful when learning that Tzu Chi had authorized \$300,000 in direct assistance for the people here.

**I love what the [Buddhist] Tzu Chi Foundation is doing. I almost want to be part of it – if I didn’t have all my duties and my jobs here. Being able to go around the world, go to different places, spread love, share your message, and just come into the really severely impacted places, bring resources, bring your spirit, bring your love, it’s amazing.**



**Matthew Serratto**  
Mayor  
City of Merced

Regarding what lies ahead for Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region’s continued January 2023 California winter storm recovery mission, Minjhing Hsien plans to work closely with county supervisors and local community leaders in the affected areas since they know their situation best. Furthermore, the long-term plan will extend beyond assisting through FEMA and encompass aid in additional counties.



A care recipient reads Master Cheng Yen's letter of condolences, her personal message making her presence feel tangible. Photo/C. M. Yung

However, as the disaster area is so widespread, the needs assessment will no doubt be more arduous. "We have to go to many, many locations to actually talk to people affected, to see the homes flooded. So, we have to physically and personally visit a lot of places," Hsieh explained. Despite such extra demands on their time, the Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region volunteer team is ready and eager to start as soon as possible, bringing Master Cheng Yen's blessings and love wherever they go.

As for the winter storm-soaked Californians who are no strangers to disasters of various

kinds in this so-called sunshine state, this water-borne catastrophe won't drown their resilience. One might say Susan Devine spoke for them all when she stated, "I prefer to look at myself as a flood survivor, not a flood victim, and that is a major difference in frame of mind. And I'm getting to the point where I'm saying, 'This is just a hiccup in my life.' This is just a hiccup, and I go on." Mercedes Perez echoed that outlook, urging all the disaster survivors, "Just keep going with a positive mind. Always keep your head up. No matter how it feels, like, 'You lost everything?' There's always going to be hope." 🌿



After a long but deeply fulfilling day, the entire relief team takes time to capture the moment by posing for a group photo. Photo/C. M. Yung

# A LOTUS BLOOMS IN LAS VEGAS

Celebrating **20** Years of Relief

*Written by Audrey Cheng*

*Edited by Adriana DiBenedetto*



The Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters Region's Las Vegas Service Center commemorates 20 years of service with a Lunar New Year 2023 celebration. Photo/James Huang

For two decades, Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas volunteers have carried forth community service missions with a care that's central to their approach, and a heart of gratitude for being able to help in a deeply personal way. Reflecting upon this, Tzu Chi's founder, Dharma Master Cheng Yen, has likened their aid under the city's iconic lights to "a lotus that blooms in the city of Las Vegas."

This year, on February 12, 2023, just a short distance away from the neon lights on the Las Vegas Strip in Nevada, Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center celebrated its 20th birthday at the Flamingo Clark County Library Theater. In recognition of this spirit of service, the special commemorative event also invited the community to gather together in joy for all that's yet to come.

Established in 2002, Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center has delivered international disaster relief, organized bone marrow drives, food distribution events, support for youths, promoted environmental protection, and so much more. Now, volunteers will keep the momentum going by adding a new service to help the community: Vision care via a brand new Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinic unit.

Tzu Chi's Vision Mobile Clinics bring free vision care services that change lives. Fully staffed by volunteers and outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment, patients can receive vision screenings, eye exams, prescription lenses, and stylish frames – all for free and usually within the same day. This unit is the 10th mobile unit from Tzu Chi Medical Foundation and offers crucial support for students and people who are uninsured or underinsured.



## **A Community Responds to an Emergency**

On August 17, 1999, three professors, two family members, and eleven students from the Department of Business Administration at National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan toured the Western United States. Tragically, a fatal road accident in Death

Valley took the lives of four students, seriously injured another student, and hurt several others.

After the accident, Chung Cheng University contacted local community members through various channels for assistance. One such individual approached for help in Las Vegas was Audrey Cheng, the elder sister of a law professor at National Chung



Cheng University. At that time, a Tzu Chi service center did not exist in Las Vegas, so Tzu Chi USA quickly mobilized volunteers from the Phoenix Service Center in Arizona and Tzu Chi USA's National Headquarters in San Dimas, California. Audrey Cheng, a local newspaper reporter, brought the event to light and called upon others to organize and help a hospitalized survivor, a student by the name of Mr. Deng.

Mr. Deng remained in the hospital for several months, and the local community members who helped him became the initial members of Tzu Chi USA's volunteer team in Las Vegas. Since then, volunteers Joanne Chen, Juliet Lee, and Gemma Tsao have worked tirelessly to establish a caring Tzu Chi community in Las Vegas. Their efforts ultimately paid off, and on November 19, 2002, Joanne Chen became the first director



In 2002, the preparatory meeting for setting up Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center is held at the home of its first director, Joanne Chen (second row, fourth right). Photo/Audrey Cheng



During the SARS outbreak of 2003, William Keh (middle) works with Las Vegas volunteer Juliet Lee (right) to purchase N95 masks to protect the health of Taiwan's medical staff. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center

of Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center. Juliet Lee played a key role in procuring N95 masks during the SARS outbreak of 2003, and Gemma Tsao put on the first bone marrow drive in Chinatown. Thus, Tzu Chi officially made its debut in Las Vegas.

Las Vegas is a city that's well-known worldwide, often characterized by its neon lights, lively atmosphere, and the clanking of slot machines. Thus, there are also casino dealers among the volunteer team who rely on their jobs to make a living. Yet, they wondered if it would be self-defeating or contentious for them to call on people to quit gambling. Some new volunteers had been reluctant to continue their jobs as casino dealers. After repeated discussions, they accepted the notion that casino dealers provide a service that people look forward to on vacation as a way to unwind. However, they still believed that dealers should not sit by idly if they notice someone who may be

dealing with a gambling addiction, unable to extricate themselves without help. In these situations, they readily inform guests of phone numbers for organizations that help.

Beginning in 2003, volunteers recruited more new members through English language classes, vegetarian cooking classes, and banquets. They extended the reach of their charity missions by visiting individual care recipients, with some care cases spanning longer periods. They additionally urged and organized volunteers to send aid to El Salvador, Peru, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, and beyond by joining Tzu Chi's international disaster relief program. Volunteers mobilized to work in San Diego following a wildfire in California and aided in Texas and New Orleans after Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey.

After Hurricane Katrina, economic strife in the United States gradually surfaced.

Long after the storm, most of the impacted homes in New Orleans had not yet been rebuilt, reminding people of the depths of the flooding and their sorrow. Feeling that the circumstances left them with no other choice, many medical workers relocated to find work elsewhere. Likewise, local community members expressed a feeling that they were still emotionally bobbing in the turbulent waves, uncertain of their future in Louisiana – perhaps especially due to the state’s location on the Gulf Coast and regularly experiencing the effects of damaging storms. “When I close my eyes, it seems that choking seawater is forcing its way into me,” one hurricane survivor told volunteers.

Some people chose to leave the area, moving to Las Vegas. In addition to participating in disaster relief, Tzu Chi USA’s Las Vegas volunteers assisted and counseled Hurricane Katrina survivors referred by the Long-Term

Recovery Committee and other charitable organizations, helping survivors along their path to recovery.

## Backpacks Filled With Love Bring Hope to Students

Although the government helped disaster survivors who relocated to Las Vegas, many families were affected by food or housing insecurity. Schools provided free lunch on school days, but children had limited or uncertain food availability on weekends. Volunteers discovered that some children tried to sleep all day long so they might forget their hunger, and some children added hot water to McDonald’s ketchup to make tomato soup. These heart-rending stories ushered in the School Backpacks Program in 2006, the first taking place at John S. Park Elementary School’s indoor gymnasium.



On January 23, 2007, volunteer Tanya So (right) assembles a team to deliver backpacks to the first school where the Las Vegas Service Center launched its School Backpacks Program. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi USA’s Las Vegas Service Center



In 2006, volunteers Alex Yang (middle) and Julie Young (right) serve watermelons while volunteer Ker Lin plays the harmonica in the distance. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center

## Free Meals With Friends in the Desert

In Henderson, Nevada, among the fastest-growing cities in the United States, Friends in The Desert Foundation, Inc. serves hot sit-down meals to unhoused neighbors six days per week and distributes sack lunches on Saturdays. It has served the community since 1998.

In 2006, Tzu Chi volunteers began to provide vegetarian food at Friends in The Desert Foundation, Inc., seeing to it that every step of the way would be carefully tended to, from meal preparation to cooking, to setting the table and chatting with diners. Volunteers also organized entertaining performances so that every activity would be the best it could be.

## Food, Celebrations, and Wellness

Since the establishment of the Blind Center of Nevada in Las Vegas, the Lions Club, and private organizations have provided free lunches for approximately 70 people on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Financial constraints made it necessary to skip Tuesdays when the facility provided tacos for purchase. However, for some, Tuesday had become synonymous with hunger, unable to afford to eat just one meal a day.

In April 2007, Las Vegas volunteers began visiting the center every Tuesday to offer company and make lunch. They additionally hold a birthday celebration each month, and help Dr. Merek, a podiatrist, once every three months by washing and soaking Blind Center of Nevada members' feet for easier nail care.

## Taking on Environmental Responsibility

From July 2007 to March 2008, Tzu Chi promoted a campaign advocating the individuals' responsibility to reduce carbon emissions that cause collective harm. To gain support within the community, volunteers visited people and organizations, sharing ways they could join hands with this grassroots campaign.

Kurtis Chen, the then-general manager of Dinghao Supermarket, strongly supported Tzu Chi's initiative. He arranged for Tzu Chi to set up a booth in Dinghao Plaza every Monday from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM starting on February 9, 2007. At the booth, volunteers recycled aluminum cans and plastic water bottles. Every Thursday from

2:00 to 4:00 PM, a Tzu Chi vehicle made its rounds at organizations or companies to collect recycling materials in the hopes that their presence might bring awareness to the issue of damaging pollutants that enter our natural environment. Moreover, they hoped to inspire others to participate in sustainable practices like recycling and choosing reusable alternatives over single-use plastics.

Later, a new owner purchased Dinghao Supermarket, and Kurtis Chen became a teacher. However, he continued to work with Tzu Chi on its path of protecting the Earth until he had to start a new course. Volunteers Cheng Ho Chen and Tanya So took over for Kurtis Chen at the supermarket. During this period, the recycling efforts attracted many people to join in, indeed.



Kurtis Chen, the then-general manager of Dinghao Supermarket, is a strong supporter of Tzu Chi's environmental protection initiative and is personally hands-on in the effort. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center



On December 14, 2014, volunteers Kelvin Chen (left) and Audrey Cheng (right) begin visiting the Clark County Detention Center to hold Jing Si Aphorism reading sessions with people who had been incarcerated. Photo/Lai Nayin

## Care After Automobile Accidents

In 2008, three exchange students from China – two doctoral candidates and another graduate – lost their lives in a road accident near the Grand Canyon. At 4:00 PM on January 30, 2009, roughly 190 miles northwest of Arizona, near the Hoover Dam, a tour bus overturned on Highway 93 on its return trip to Las Vegas, killing seven passengers on board and seriously injuring five others. Another five individuals suffered minor injuries. The 15 tourists in the car were all from Shanghai and Hangzhou tour groups, plus a tour guide and a driver. The tour group included 20 people from five families. In 2010, a group of Chinese visitors who came to learn about highway construction projects in the United States also passed away in a car accident about 10 minutes from the previous location. Volunteers in Las Vegas went to the hospital daily to deliver meals, provide translation assistance, and aid the survivors of these tragic accidents with various needs.

## An All-Encompassing Heart

In 2014, several volunteers from Nevada were allowed to participate in volunteer training organized by the State of Nevada Department of Corrections. That August, volunteers went to the Clark County Detention Center's North Valley Complex in Las Vegas for the first time. The main driving force for this project came from volunteers Kelvin Chen, Nain Lai, and Johan Alwall from Tzu Chi USA's National Headquarters in San Dimas, with Las Vegas volunteers joining them to learn from their experience.

In January 2016, Las Vegas volunteers Christine Fisk and Audrey Cheng took the lead for visits to the Clark County Detention Center to share Buddhist teachings with those incarcerated there. Since then, the third Saturday of each month has become a standing appointment. Additionally, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the nation in 2020, and they learned of rising infection rates in correctional facilities, the volunteers donated 2,800 masks to help flatten the curve.



Tsuilin Valenzuela (fourth right), leader of Tzu Chi International Medical Association's Las Vegas chapter, is the heart and soul of the medical volunteer team in the city. Photo/Peter Summons

## Routine Free Dental and Vision Care

According to the Nevada Homeless Alliance, 13,076 Southern Nevadans, including families with children, will experience homelessness at some point this year. Many unsheltered young people in Las Vegas are also survivors of domestic violence. Las Vegas volunteers have distributed hot meals to people experiencing homelessness since 2007 and have provided free dental clinics since 2015. By working together, volunteers will continue to cultivate a cycle of care that touches ever more lives.

The Las Vegas medical volunteer team has called upon caring doctors in the community to join the free clinic team and help it grow. Since

its establishment in 2015, Tzu Chi Las Vegas has held 13 free clinics and added a free ophthalmology clinic in 2019. By working together, there's no end to the good they can achieve in the region.

It's been quite a remarkable two decades of service for the Las Vegas volunteer team. May the Las Vegas Service Center's activities flourish going forward, with its volunteers offering compassion and relief for many more years.

**Unity of hearts enables limitless accomplishments.**

*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*





*Written by Adriana DiBenedetto*



# Cheer Abounds at Magalia's “Moving Forward Holiday Celebration”

*Written by Adriana DiBenedetto*

Love does not make demands on others.  
Love gives of itself and offers without conditions.

*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*





During Tzu Chi's "Moving Forward Holiday Celebration" on December 10, 2022, attendees enjoy live music and receive holiday gifts and a delicious vegetarian lunch. Photo/Min Yung Cheung

**O**n December 10, 2022, as joyful anticipation for the year-end festivities abounded, Tzu Chi volunteers returned to Magalia, California, to hold a special "Moving Forward Holiday Celebration," where even the turbulent weather couldn't discourage Camp Fire survivors and volunteers from rejoining their hearts again.

The 2018 Camp Fire caused terrible destruction in Northern California, and Tzu Chi USA's disaster response was swift. Today, while four years have passed, Tzu Chi volunteers continue to hold affected residents close to heart.

**Sitting and praying with you, and just having been asked, 'How is your family doing? Are you all okay?' That meant so much to me.**

**Patti Tucker**  
"Moving Forward Holiday Celebration" Attendee

Having come a long way since the November 2018 wildfire, volunteers and community members alike were eager to reconnect with neighbors and friends in Butte County. The celebration program treated attendees to live music, a delicious vegetarian lunch, and holiday gifts such as blankets, scarves, handmade soap, ornaments, and bamboo banks.



## Here for You for the Long Run

Quickly becoming the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California’s history, the Camp Fire’s intense flames devoured 153,336 acres of land, destroying 18,804 structures, and tragically claiming the lives of 85 people. Mobilizing nationwide, Tzu Chi volunteers provided emergency disaster relief funds, blankets, and love. Then, Tzu Chi USA immediately launched its “Hope Heals” campaign, seeking to provide effective cash relief and more to affected families by raising donations from 10,000 people, and directly funding cash cards for 10,000 Camp Fire survivors before Christmas.

Throughout January 2019, Tzu Chi USA continued to aid communities and introduced long-term recovery plans, including disaster case management services. Knowing that it would take time to recover from such an experience, both emotionally and financially, Tzu Chi volunteers were committed to putting their compassion into action, accompanying survivors hand-in-hand and shoulder-to-shoulder on the path to recovery.

During the anniversary of the Camp Fire, Tzu Chi volunteers joined the unveiling of the “Butte Strong” monument at Magalia Community Church. The erected memorial was constructed from the bricks of fire-affected homes and is a powerful symbol of the community’s strength of heart. It was in partnership with this very church that 209 community residents assembled in 2022 to remember and reconnect.

Upon entering Magalia Community Church, guests were greeted by Tzu Chi volunteers from all over Northern California. The delicious, hot vegetarian food volunteers prepared that morning was also ready to be enjoyed. The event began with warm welcomes from Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region Executive Director Minjing Hsieh, whose presence and words of encouragement have been a constant on this long road to recovery.

**I know it’s a very rainy, rainy day, and it’s cold out there, but I can feel the love and warmth here inside. Thank you.**

**Minjing Hsieh**

*Executive Director*

*Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region*



Celebration attendee Richard Yale, a retired pastor, has been a close partner of Tzu Chi during the Camp Fire long-term recovery mission since November 2018. *Photo/Min Yung Cheung*



Volunteers ready more than 100 lunch boxes for the event, with another 100 graciously prepared by Magalia Community Church. *Photo/Min Yung Cheung*



Bruce Yerman (right), Director of Operations for the Camp Fire Collaborative, which partners with nonprofits to help fire survivors, attends the event. Minjhing Hsieh (left), Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA Northwest Region, is deeply grateful for the collaboration on this road to healing and recovery. *Photo/Min Yung Cheung*



Disaster Case Manager Baba Kauna Mujamal acts as the MC for the event. The weather is gloomy on December 10, but volunteers are pleasantly surprised by the turnout as they reunite with many community residents. *Photo/Min Yung Cheung*

Acting as the MC for the event, Tzu Chi USA Disaster Case Manager Baba Kauna Mujamal filled the decorated space with warm enthusiasm and humor. Explaining the origin of Tzu Chi's DA.AI Technology eco-blankets, Baba also brought forth new insight into the love that's deeply woven into every thread.

The philosophy behind Tzu Chi's DA.AI Technology eco-blankets is inspired by the teachings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who guides us all to coexist with the environment. With this in mind, thousands of Tzu Chi recycling volunteers reclaim plastic waste for transformation into eco-friendly textiles like those used to make the eco-blankets Tzu Chi volunteers have delivered to disaster survivors during relief missions since 2006.



The wind chased the rain and dark clouds across the sky, but one couldn't tell from the festive ambiance within the church. In addition to the distribution of holiday gift bags and blankets, the event also featured performances by wildfire survivors and volunteers. The inspiring musical numbers soothed the heart and set the tone for an afternoon of care, laughter, and togetherness.

Sacramento Tzu Chi Youth Group volunteers were the main force behind the event's distribution. From guiding guests to their seats, packing supplies, and arranging the distribution route, the Tzu Chi Youth Group students did it all. More than half of the thirteen young volunteers present were visiting Magalia for the second time.

## Remembering the Past Looking Toward the Future

Survivors of the 2018 Camp Fire looked forward to meeting old friends and sharing new experiences. Many moved out of town or even out of state after the disaster, and it had been a while since they'd seen some of these friendly faces.

One Camp Fire survivor, Rosemary Poshard, had returned to California for business, and that's when she received the text message from Tzu Chi. Originally from California's Bay Area, she'd lived in Paradise for twenty years before the wildfire destroyed her beloved home.



Young Tzu Chi members perform on stage at the celebration to lift attendees' spirits. Photo/Min Yung Cheung



Tzu Chi Youth Group volunteers offer gift bags to guests at the "Moving Forward Holiday Celebration" at the Magalia Community Church. Photo/Min Yung Cheung



Rosemary Poshard, a Camp Fire survivor, was glad to see a message from Tzu Chi about the upcoming celebration, hoping to give thanks to the volunteers. Photo/Nancy Ku

“I got the invitation on my cell phone from you guys, and I had been so touched by the generosity that you folks showed when we were all standing in line, not knowing what to do with ourselves, in shock because our homes had burned. We didn’t know where our friends were; we didn’t know where our home was,” expressed Rosemary. “It’s frightening to be in that situation. But more than anything, it’s frightening to be alone, and you guys were so kind and so loving when you gave out the donations. It wasn’t just money. I truly felt like you cared about my community.”

Rosemary’s words touched the volunteers’ hearts, and she also presented them with a box of chocolates alongside a donation to Tzu Chi to help others.

**I wanted to give back somehow, and even though it’s pouring rain outside and the weather’s lousy, I wanted to say thank you in some way, so thank you for loving mankind the way you do.**

***Rosemary Poshard***

*“Moving Forward Holiday Celebration” Attendee*

By the end of the event, Tzu Chi volunteers were surprised to receive several bamboo banks full of donations from attendees who also wished to pay their love forward and be a light for someone else someday.

Once the “Moving Forward Holiday Celebration” concluded, the downpour seemed to subside just a bit, as though the reunion had generated a wave of positive energy that broke through the clouds.

After any disaster transpires, it takes time for survivors to rebuild their lives. It’s also important to remember and stay in touch on this journey. The people who attended this gathering weren’t just friends and partners, but family, indeed. 🌿



Musical performances by multiple talented individuals bring forth joy and reflection.  
*Photo/Min Yung Cheung*



Patti Tucker attends the holiday celebration with her grandchildren.  
*Photo/Min Yung Cheung*

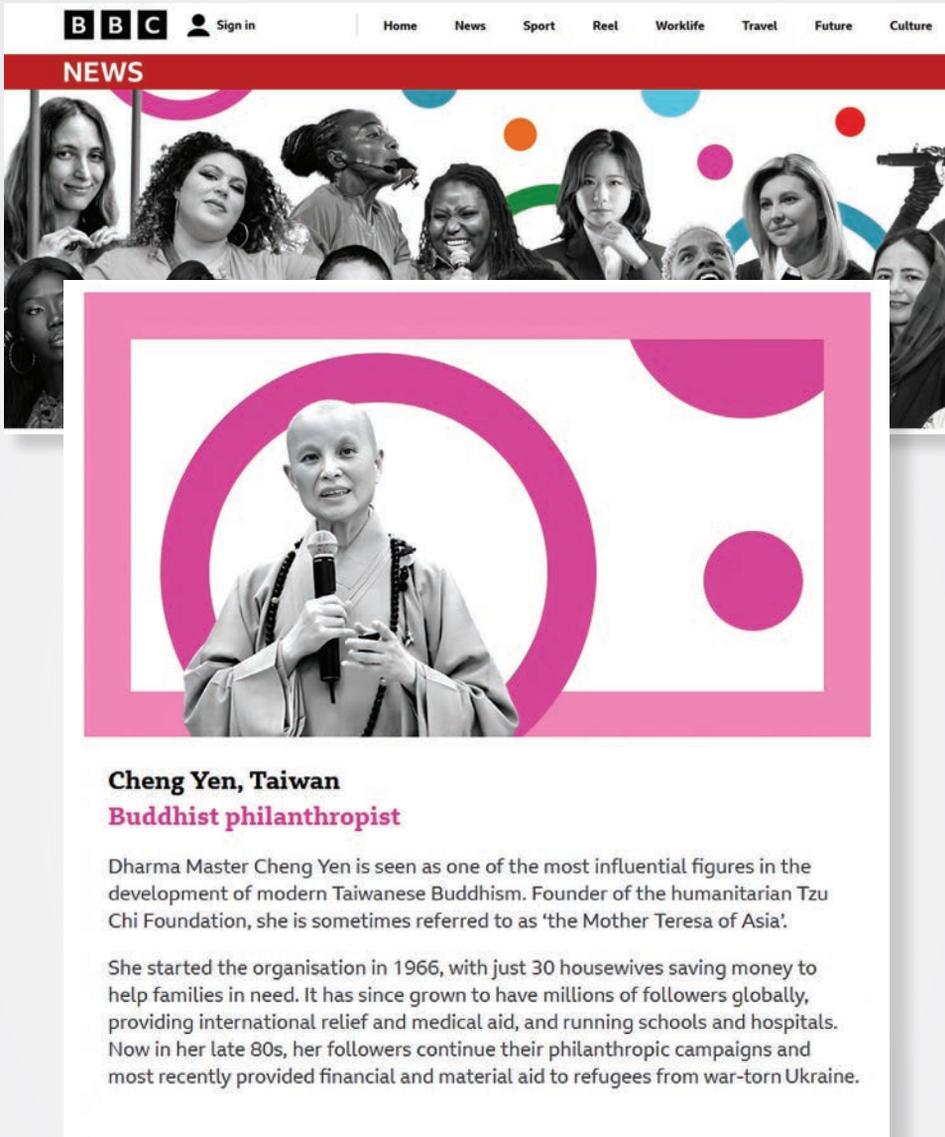




Marlene Woodard, a retired social worker who has aided many Camp Fire survivors, is happy to see the Tzu Chi volunteers again. *Photo/Nancy Ku*

Forty Tzu Chi volunteers from San Jose, the Central Valley, Modesto, Sacramento, Chico, and Magalia make the celebration a heartfelt one to remember. *Photo/Sai Leong Wong*





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**NEWS**

**Cheng Yen, Taiwan**  
**Buddhist philanthropist**

Dharma Master Cheng Yen is seen as one of the most influential figures in the development of modern Taiwanese Buddhism. Founder of the humanitarian Tzu Chi Foundation, she is sometimes referred to as 'the Mother Teresa of Asia'.

She started the organisation in 1966, with just 30 housewives saving money to help families in need. It has since grown to have millions of followers globally, providing international relief and medical aid, and running schools and hospitals. Now in her late 80s, her followers continue their philanthropic campaigns and most recently provided financial and material aid to refugees from war-torn Ukraine.

# BBC's 100 Women of 2022

Features Dharma Master Cheng Yen

*Written by Adriana DiBenedetto*

**O**n December 6, 2022, the BBC unveiled its annual series highlighting the lives and accomplishments of passionate female artists, innovators, and activists from across the globe. We are humbled and honored that Tzu Chi's founder, Master Cheng Yen, often called the "Mother Teresa of Asia," was included as an influential Buddhist philanthropist alongside so many who move hearts and inspire hope.

Striving to find answers to some of life's greatest questions, Dharma Master Cheng Yen began to study Buddhism at an early age. And at 25, she decided to leave home to become a nun.

Deeply affected by the suffering she saw around her, Master Cheng Yen and 30 female spiritual followers vowed to make a difference in the world, undeterred by the obstacles before them. They began making baby shoes and other handmade products for sale and put US 2¢ aside daily from their grocery fund in homemade bamboo banks to help others. Through this spirit of gentle perseverance and steadfast dedication, wonders did abound.

Today, she inspires the hearts of millions across the globe. The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation was established in 1966, with the Foundation's footprints of humanitarian relief reaching 128 countries and regions worldwide – and counting.

Master Cheng Yen's path reveals how profoundly each loving thought counts, and that indeed, love can change lives. With gratitude in our hearts, we carry forth Tzu Chi's spirit of compassion in action, recognizing that there's no end to the good we can do together. 🌿

**Do not underestimate yourself,  
for human beings have unlimited potential.**  
*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

# ON THE PATH TO AWAKENING LIFETIME AFTER LIFETIME

*We should emulate the Buddha's universal love. The Buddha is able to dedicate himself to all living beings; we also have the ability to tirelessly devote ourselves to saving all beings.*

*Master Cheng Yen's Teachings | Translated and Compiled by the Dharma as Water Team*

At the end of October 2022, we began the annual year-end blessing ceremonies, and we traveled down eastern Taiwan to southern Taiwan before heading north again on the west side. What I am joyful about on this trip is the certification for new commissioners and Faith Corps members, as we have brought in a new group of Bodhisattvas. Only after volunteers are certified have they truly begun to walk on the Bodhisattva Path, so it is most important to be even more diligent.

Volunteers are people who form aspirations to dedicate themselves to society and walk the Bodhisattva Path. Wherever there is a need, they will immediately take action so that those who are in need of help can receive encouragement and strength. What is most important, however, is providing people with genuine and sincere love so that they can feel that warmth and love from society.

Over more than fifty years, my every thought has been dedicated toward the Buddha's teachings and sentient beings, and Tzu Chi volunteers have followed me. In every year-end blessing ceremony, volunteers joined the sutra musical adaptation, and I am very grateful and touched seeing how dignified and orderly everyone was. I have such aspirations, and my disciples carry them out; I have such faith, and my disciples have the understanding, faith, aspirations, and actions. They are very close to my heart and are united in harmony, and this makes me feel that my life has truly been worthwhile and valuable.

More than 2,500 years ago, the Buddha left the palace, as he saw the suffering in this world. Now, 2,500 years later, we see that in Lumbini,

Nepal, which is the Buddha's birthplace, life there is still very simple, underdeveloped, and people are still impoverished. People there think that life is to be lived like this, day after day, month after month, year after year. They think that if they are poor, they will forever be poor, and that if they are rich, then generation after generation will be wealthy, too. The Buddha saw that people were helpless against poverty, illness, aging, and death. As he deeply contemplated, he realized that the suffering of this world was more than just a lack of material things, but it was also because people are lacking spiritually. It was not something that money could solve. Instead, he knew he had to help people thoroughly realize the true principles in life, let go of the ignorance of attachment, and guide everyone toward a path of enlightenment where no one will be lost, lifetime after lifetime.

When we have afflictions and thoughts of greed within our minds, we will never be satisfied, and we will always fear gains and losses. When we gain, we are joyful and hope that we can possess everything. But no matter how much we try to seek for more, we will always feel that we are still lacking and will never be satisfied. This state of mind is what causes sentient beings to suffer. The Buddha wished to transform the minds of sentient beings and enable us to understand the principles of impermanence, suffering, and emptiness so that we can awaken in time, stop chasing after our desires, eliminate ignorance, and find contentment. Those who



are content will know to create blessings, and if we are willing to give of ourselves and create blessings, then we are living a rich life of abundance.

My aspiration is to transform Nepal and to transform suffering. In fact, it is really about transforming this world and people's lives. I hope to transform people's thoughts of greed into thoughts of giving. During my travels this time, I have heard Bodhisattvas share about how they have transformed their lives. Their mindsets had deviated in the past, which led them to create karma. However once they corrected themselves, moving toward the right direction, they began following the Buddha Dharma and the Bodhisattva Path. The ultimate state of kindness is having no expectations. Even if we do not ask for anything in return, we will still be filled with Dharma joy. In addition, because we have opened the doors to our hearts, there will be nothing that we cannot let go of, nor will we have trouble getting along with others. In this way, we will have no afflictions that trouble us.

During the year-end blessing ceremonies, I also heard elderly Bodhisattvas share their thoughts.

Although deep in their hearts, they wish to continue moving forward, due to old age, their legs have lost strength. I feel this too. The last time I traveled, I was still able to walk with relative ease and climb up and down the stairs without much trouble. Now, even walking on flat roads requires a bit of effort. However, I constantly remind myself to still maintain good posture and stand up straight. Even though old age, illness, and deterioration of the body is suffering, I am still very joyful and grateful. I think back to those times when I was alone and stepped onto this path by myself. Now, when I turn around, tens of thousands of people are following me in an orderly fashion. What a magnificent and dignified team! These volunteers are

like fireflies glittering in the dark and lighting up the path for people; they bring purity to people's hearts and harmony to the society in this world of Five Turbidities, and they embody truth, goodness, and beauty!

Thus, elderly Bodhisattvas must not submit themselves to old age. We may not have power over our age, but we have formed Bodhisattva aspirations, and we have the mission of going amongst people. Although I walk slowly, my strides are wide, for only in this way can I train my legs to be stronger. When we have the will and aspiration, we will find strength. Not only does Taiwan need us, but many countries around the world need us too.

It is not enough to have only my strength and yours; we still need to recruit more Bodhisattvas. You must not forget the experienced commissioners who brought you into Tzu Chi at the beginning. You must be like them too, to proactively look for people and transform others. Our Dharma lineage and school of Buddhism need to be connected like this and be passed on from generation to generation. We must all shoulder the responsibility of transforming sentient beings and purifying this world.

At the Abode, I had put a handmade ant figure on my clock. I feel I am like this diligent ant, always racing against time. Although I am small and insignificant and already at this age, I still do not want to give up. We must always be grateful that we are in Tzu Chi together. We have entered and are walking on this Bodhisattva Path together, but we must continue our work until our last breath. When we reach the end, we must remember to continue this will to practice as we begin our life journey again. I hope that everyone will always be diligent, so that we can pass on the power of love to future generations in this world! 🐜

*Compiled from Master Cheng Yen's teachings from October 30 to November 9, 2022*

# THE GOLDEN RULE

• As Expressed in the Scriptures of Several World Religions •

## **Bahá'í**

*"Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you,  
and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself."*

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings

## **Buddhism**

*"Do not hurt others in ways you yourself would find hurtful."*

Udanavarga 5:18

## **Christianity**

*"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,  
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

Bible, Matthew 7:12

## **Confucianism**

*"Is there any one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one's whole life?  
Surely the maxim of loving-kindness is such – Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."*

Confucius, Analects 15.23

## **Hinduism**

*"This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you."*

Mahabharata 5:1517

## **Islam**

*"None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself."*

An-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths 13

## **Jainism**

*"In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self,  
and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as  
would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves."*

Mahavira, Yogashastra

## **Judaism**

*"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary."*

Talmud, Shabbat 31a

## **Sikhism**

*"No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone."*

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Gurbani Ang 1299

## **Taoism**

*"Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss,  
even as though you were in their place."*

Lao Tzu, T'ai-Shang Kan-Ying P'ien 213-228

## **Zorostrianisam**

*"Do not do unto others all that which is not good for one's self."*

Šāyest-nē-Šāyest 13.29



# Illuminations

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

## BEWARE THE WORDS OF FORTUNE TELLERS

**Question:** *“A fortune teller said that I will not escape from predestined calamities this year. I am so worried and afraid.”*

**Answer:** *“Do not be superstitious and believe in fortune telling. You should be aware that suspicions create imaginary fears. When we transform our hearts as ordinary beings to the heart of the Buddha and cultivate ourselves to be compassionate, then we will be blessed. Once we are blessed, we will be able to eliminate misfortunes.”*

## GOOD DEEDS DISPEL DISASTERS

**Question:** *“A fortune teller told me that I will encounter a predestined calamity this year, and that he can dispel it, but it comes at a price!”*

**Answer:** *“One kind deed can dispel a thousand disasters. We create our own karma, so of course it is up to us to change it ourselves. Don’t ever blindly spend money to eliminate misfortunes! Transgressions originate in our minds, and our minds can also repent of those wrongdoings. If we erase wrongdoings from our minds, those wrongdoings will then cease. Do not try to run away from your problems.”*

## CULTIVATE JOY, NOT REGRET

**Question:** *“Sometimes, I come to regret the things I joyfully did in the past. I also like to do good deeds, but I sometimes feel afflicted. I cannot manage my emotions. What should I do?”*

**Answer:** *“You feel this way because you have not cultivated joy in your heart. You should constantly maintain a heart of joy, and when you are working, you must maintain a grateful mind and view all things with understanding.”*



# Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation Global Relief Efforts

by Jiali Liu, Adriana DiBenedetto, and Ida Eva Zielinska



 Poland

After establishing a “Dumpling Club,” Tzu Chi volunteers host a charity sale on December 2, 2022, inviting seniors from Ukraine to come together and make dumplings for the event. *Photo/Ru Yi Zhou*



On December 1, 2022, Tzu Chi volunteers work alongside the Future for Children Foundation (Fundacja Przyszłość dla Dzieci) in Olsztyn, to distribute cash cards to Ukrainian families. *Photo/Wan Yin Zhong*



 Chile

On November 27, 2022, Tzu Chi Chile volunteers hold a year-end relief distribution and vision care clinic at the Educational Center Principality of Asturia (Centro Educativo Principado de Asturias), benefiting 193 families. *Photo/Tzu Chi Chile*



 Mozambique

After Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique in 2019, Tzu Chi helped construct Great Love Villages. On December 7, 2022, Tzu Chi volunteers hold a ceremony to hand over Great Love Houses in Sofala Province. *Photo/Tzu Chi Mozambique*



 Singapore

On December 4, 2022, Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong and members of Parliament visit Tzu Chi's Environmental Education Recycling Point at Block 624 in Ang Mo Kio. *Photo/Yi Wen Wu*



 Thailand

Tzu Chi Thailand launches a Basic Excel Course to support refugees in gaining career skills. A graduation ceremony for the course takes place on November 5, 2022. *Photo/Pin Ti Su*



 The Philippines

On November 27, 2022, Tzu Chi volunteers visit the Municipality of Talaingod in Davao del Norte Province to deliver care to Indigenous Peoples by distributing vegetarian food, rice, and household items. *Photo/Tzu Chi Philippines*



 Turkey

After a magnitude 7.8 earthquake strikes Turkey on February 6, 2023, Tzu Chi Taiwan rushes to prepare over 8,000 eco-blankets for shipment, with the first batch in 462 boxes arriving in Istanbul on February 10, and the second and third batch sent at the same time. *Photo/Hejiao Chen* 🌿



# Tzu Chi USA Relief Efforts

by Ida Eva Zielinska

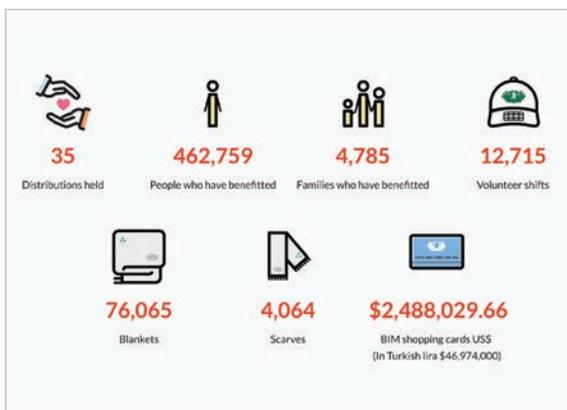
## Providing Disaster Relief



To support the global Tzu Chi community's disaster relief effort in response to the magnitude 7.8 earthquake in Turkey on February 6, 2023, Tzu Chi USA launches its urgent Turkey Earthquake Relief fundraiser on February 8, with matching donations up to one million USD. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Website*



On February 4, 2023, Tzu Chi USA Southern Region volunteers provide disaster aid to 42 families (comprising 123 individuals) in Texas impacted by a rare winter tornado on January 24. The twister had ripped through the Houston suburbs of Pasadena and Deer Park, causing extensive damages. *Photo/Jong Wu*



After earthquakes strike Turkey and the surrounding region in February, killing more than 50,000 people, Tzu Chi Relief volunteers arrive on the ground to provide emergency aid. They distribute blankets and scarves for survivors to stay warm, as well as supermarket shopping cards (valued at more than \$2.48 million in total). *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Website*

## Supporting Community and Interfaith Collaboration



On February 8, Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters in California hosts the 2023 Housing Summit of the San Gabriel Valley Consortium on Homelessness, where representatives from Los Angeles County, San Gabriel Valley housing and welfare departments, experts, scholars, and nonprofits can learn about housing needs, and generate solutions and means of making affordable housing available. *Photo/James Huang*



The Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief in New York hosts a gathering on February 9, 2023, to mark United Nations observed annual World Interfaith Harmony Week and bring together spiritual and institutional leaders who address refugee, migrant, and asylum-seeker challenges, aiming to collaboratively strengthen the collective response to the needs of the displaced. *Photo/En Pu Ko*

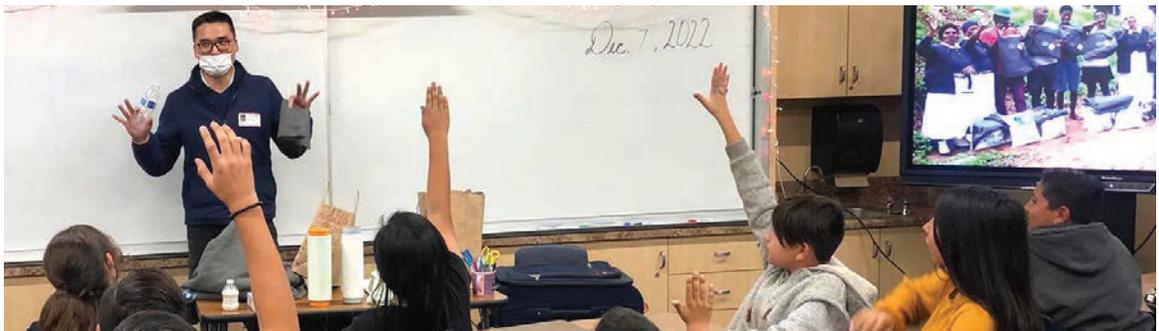


Representatives of IsraAID and ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), two organizations that signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tzu Chi regarding aid for Ukrainians, visit Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters in San Dimas, California, on February 24, 2023, the first anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine War. They discuss international aid challenges and current earthquake relief in Turkey. *Photo/Jennifer Chien*



On February 26, 2023, the Mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, visits the Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinic stationed at the NYPD Community Center in Brooklyn. The free vision care clinic was offering free eye exams and prescription glasses for disadvantaged students and families, an ongoing program of the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region in the New York metropolitan area. *Photo/Hui Liu*

## Cultivating Environmental Awareness



At the invitation of Shelyn Elementary School in Rowland Heights, California, on December 7, 2022, the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters Region's education team visits the school's Recycle Club to teach the importance of environmental stewardship. *Photo/Ziwen Wang* 🌱

State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax	State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax	
AZ	Phoenix Service Center	2145 W. Elliot Rd. Chandler, AZ 85224	480-838-6556 F: 480-777-7665	KS	Kansas Office	9508 Shannon Way Circle Wichita, KS 67206	316-323-5798	
S. CA	Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, US Headquarters Area	1100 S. Valley Center Ave. San Dimas, CA 91773	909-447-7799 F: 909-447-7948	LA	New Orleans Office	52 Driftwood Blvd. Kenner, LA 70065	504-782-5168 F: 504-832-2022	
	Jing Si Books & Café, San Dimas		909-447-7799 x 6569	MD	Montgomery County Service Center		703-707-8606 F: 301-339-8872	
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Dimas		909-447-7799 x 6551 F: 909-447-7944	MA	Boston Service Center	15 Summer St.	617-762-0569	
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation	1008 S. Garfield Ave. Alhambra, CA 91801	626-427-9598 F: 626-788-2321	MA	Tzu Chi Academy, Boston	Newton, MA 02464	617-431-4844 F: 617-431-4484	
	Tzu Chi Medical Center, Alhambra		626-281-3383 F: 626-281-5303	MI	Lansing Office	3511 West Hiawatha Dr., Okemos, MI 48864	517-505-3388	
	Tzu Chi Community Clinic, South El Monte	10414 Vacco St. South El Monte, CA 91733	626-636-8706 F: 626-671-8778	MI	Detroit Service Center	6825 Textile Rd. Ypsilanti, MI 48197	586-795-3491 F: 586-795-3491	
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Education Foundation	1920 S. Brea Canyon Cutoff Rd. Walnut, CA 91789	909-895-2125 F: 909-345-7025	MN	Minneapolis Office	1485 Arden View Dr. Arden Hills, MN 55112	617-939-6965	
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Walnut		909-895-2126 F: 909-927-8336	MO	St. Louis Service Center	8515 Olive Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132	314-994-1999 F: 314-994-1999	
	Tzu Chi Elementary, Walnut		909-895-2125 x 3200 F: 909-345-7025	NV	Reno Office	903 West Moana Lane Reno, NV 89509	775-827-6333 F: 775-770-1148	
	Tzu Chi Academy, Walnut		909-895-2280	NV	Las Vegas Service Center/ Academy	2590 Lindell Rd. Las Vegas, NV 89146	702-880-5552 F: 702-880-5552	
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Monrovia	206 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-305-1188 F: 626-599-8098	NJ	Mid-Atlantic Region/Jing Si Books & Café	150 Commerce Rd. Cedar Grove, NJ 07009	973-857-8666 F: 973-857-9555	
	Tzu Chi Academy, Monrovia	220 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-775-3675 F: 626-359-8199		Tzu Chi Academy, Northern New Jersey			
	West Los Angeles Service Center	11701 Wilshire Blvd. #15A Los Angeles, CA 90025	310-473-5188 F: 310-477-9518		Tzu Chi Academy, Central New Jersey	50 Woodrow Wilson Dr., Edison, NJ 08820	973-857-8666	
	Torrance Service Center	1355 Broad Ave. Wilmington, CA 90744	310-684-4465 F: 310-684-4460		Central New Jersey Service Center		908-420-5218	
	Tzu Chi Community Clinic, Wilmington		310-684-4466 F: 855-651-1717	NY	Northeast Region/Academy	137-77 Northern Blvd. Flushing, NY 11354	718-888-0866 F: 718-460-2068	
Orange County Service Center	22911 Mill Creek Dr. Laguna Hills, CA 92653	949-916-4488 F: 949-916-5933	Jing Si Books & Café, New York				718-799-3000	
Tzu Chi Academy, Irvine	4321 Walnut Ave., Irvine, CA 92604	714-624-3026 F: 949-916-5933	Brooklyn Service Center		513 57th Street Brooklyn, NY 11220		917-909-0682	
Cerritos Service Center	14618&14620 Carmenita Rd. Norwalk, CA 90650	562-926-6609 F: 562-926-1603	Long Island Branch/Academy		60 E Williston Ave. East Williston, NY 11596	516-873-6888 F: 516-746-0626		
Northridge Service Center	8963 Reseda Blvd. Northridge, CA 91324	818-727-7689 F: 818-727-9272	Manhattan Service Center		63 Canal Street New York, NY 10002	212-965-1151 F: 212-965-1152		
San Gabriel Valley Service Center	9620 Flair Dr. El Monte, CA 91731	626-416-4527 Warehouse: 626-416-4529	East Long Island Office		4 Milburn Rd. S. Setauket, NY 11720	631-964-3393		
Jing Si Books & Café, El Monte		626-448-1362	Tzu Chi Center, New York		229 E. 60th St. New York, NY 10022	212-660-9229 F: 646-864-0086		
San Diego Service Center	5754 Pacific Center Blvd. #202 San Diego, CA 92121	858-546-0578 F: 858-546-0573			Raleigh Service Center		919-322-8389	
Northwest Region	2355 Oakland Rd. San Jose, CA 95131	408-457-6969 F: 408-943-8420	NC		Charlotte Office	4527 Dwight Evans Rd. Charlotte, NC 28217	704-281-8060 F: 704-943-1031	
Tzu Chi Academy, Tri-Valley		925-785-7413	OH		Cincinnati Office	11228 Brookbridge Dr. Cincinnati, OH 45249	513-469-2161 F: 513-469-2161	
Jing Si Books & Café, San Jose		408-457-6981		Columbus Service Center	2200 Henderson Rd. Columbus, OH 43220	614-457-9215 F: 614-457-9217		
San Francisco Branch	2901 Irving St. San Francisco, CA 94122	415-682-0566 F: 415-682-0567		Dayton Service Center	1459 E Dorothy Lane Dayton, OH 45429	937-701-7111		
Tzu Chi Academy, San Mateo	2675 Ralston Ave., Belmont, CA 94002	650-888-1582		Cleveland Service Center	1076 Ford Rd. Highland Heights, OH 44143	440-646-9292 F: 440-646-9292		
Tzu Chi Academy, San Francisco	350 Girard St. San Francisco, CA 94134	415-680-5225 F: 415-682-0567		Portland Service Center	3800 SW Cedar Hills Blvd #194 Beaverton, OR 97005	503-643-2130 F: 503-643-2130		
Modesto Service Center	1100 Carver Rd. #J Modesto, CA 95350	209-529-2625 F: 209-529-2625		OR	Tzu Chi Academy, Portland	12250 SW Conestoga Dr., Beaverton, OR 97008	503-841-7776	
Stockton Office	1212 W Robinhood Dr. #3D Stockton, CA 95207	209-957-7800 F: 209-957-7800		PA	Philadelphia Office	107 North 9th Street Philadelphia, PA 19107	215-627-1915 F: 215-627-1916	
Tzu Chi Academy, Cupertino	1280 Johnson Ave San Jose, CA 95129	408-823-8799			Pittsburgh Service Center/ Academy	1333 Banksville Rd. #201 Pittsburgh, PA 15216	412-531-8343 F: 412-531-8341	
Santa Rosa Office	2435 Professional Drive, Suite D Santa Rosa 95403	707-546-1945			Southern Region/Academy	6200 Corporate Dr. Houston, TX 77036	713-270-9988 F: 713-981-9008	
Sacramento Service Center	1820 Tribute Rd. # J Sacramento, CA 95815	916-568-5800			Jing Si Books & Café, Houston		713-981-8966	
Ukiah Office	527 S State St. #B Ukiah, CA 95482	707-462-2911 F: 707-462-2911	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Houston			713-395-0303 F: 713-395-0305		
Oakland Service Center	620 International Blvd. Oakland, CA 94606	510-879-0971 F: 510-879-0971	Austin Service Center		7221 Northeast Dr. Austin, TX 78723	512-491-0358 F: 512-926-1373		
Tzu Chi Academy, San Jose	625 Educational Park Dr. San Jose, CA 95133	408-457-6970	San Antonio Office		19179 Blanco Rd. #109-2 San Antonio, TX 78258	909-576-2387 F: 210-566-3970		
Fresno Service Center	7421 N Maple Ave. Fresno, CA 93720	559-298-4894 F: 559-298-4894	Central Region/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café		534 W. Belt Line Rd. Richardson, TX 75080	972-680-8869 F: 972-680-7732		
Orlando Service Center	5401 Alhambra Dr. #A Orlando, FL 32808	407-292-1146 F: 407-292-1146	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Dallas			214-446-1776 F: 214-446-1772		
Miami Service Center	8070 Pasadena Blvd. Pembroke Pines, FL 33024	954-538-1172 F: 317-645-9907	VA		Greater Washington D.C. Region/ Academy	1516 Moorings Dr. Reston, VA 20190	703-707-8606 F: 703-707-8607	
Atlanta Branch/ Tzu Chi Academy, Atlanta	3120 Medlock Bridge Rd. Building E Peachtree Corners, GA 30071	770-458-1000	TX	Richmond Service Center	1318 Tomahawk Creek Rd. Midlothian, VA 23114	804-306-6037 F: 804-378-3520		
GA	Pacific Islands Region/Academy	1238 Wilhelmina Rise Honolulu, HI 96816	808-737-8885	WA	Seattle Branch/Academy	15800 SE Newport Way Bellevue WA 98006	425-643-9104	
				WI	Milwaukee Office	5356 W. Silverleaf Ln, Brown Deer, WI 53223	414-357-8427	
HI	Midwest Region/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café	1430 Plainfield Rd. Darien, IL 60561	630-963-6601 F: 630-960-9360	WI	Madison Office	1019 Starlight Ln, Cottage Grove, WI 53527	608-960-1962	
				IL	Chicago Chinatown Service Center	215 W 23rd St., Chicago, IL 60616		
IN	Indianapolis Service Center	2929 E. 96th St. #E Indianapolis, IN 46240	317-580-0979	<a href="http://www.tzuchi.us">www.tzuchi.us</a>   <a href="http://www.tzuchimedical.us">www.tzuchimedical.us</a>   <a href="http://www.tzuchieducation.us">www.tzuchieducation.us</a>   <a href="http://www.jingsi.shop">www.jingsi.shop</a> <a href="http://www.tzuchi.us/offices">www.tzuchi.us/offices</a>   <a href="http://www.tzuchi.us/academy">www.tzuchi.us/academy</a>				



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Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center commemorates 20 years of love and service during its Lunar New Year celebration at the Flamingo Library Theatre on February 12, 2023. Photo/James Huang