

慈濟 Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Syrian Refugees Give Back to Taiwan



January 2022



Bring Your Light to the World

Translated by Teresa Chang

Over 30 tornadoes tore through six American states in the Midwest and South on December 10 and 11, 2021. One of the tornadoes traveled more than 300 kilometers (186 miles), a distance enough to cover Taiwan from north to south. The storms carved a path of destruction, wiping out sturdily built houses as effortlessly as if they were built of paper. Tzu Chi volunteers in the country have mobilized to help.

America has not been the only country that has been recently pummeled by natural disasters. Other examples include the Philippines, which has been devastated by a typhoon, and Malaysia, beset by severe flooding. It worries me to see our world ravaged by disasters. The effects of climate change are such that nature has been thrown out of balance, resulting in calamities occurring much more frequently. We can no longer say that those disasters are far from us—they are not as far away as you may think. The universe may be vast, but there is only one Earth, on which humanity's survival rests. Tornadoes and earthquakes are hard to predict, and wildfires burning thousands of acres seem to have become a norm. There are other kinds of disasters as well and pervasive problems such as air pollution. We can no longer think that these disasters happen only to other people. It is something we all must face.

Can humans really conquer nature? Human beings are minuscule compared to the vastness of nature, yet we have such large egos. Being self-centered, we give free rein to our greed and desires. Our unwholesome, negative thoughts and behaviors have been accumulating, and they have collectively created a massive amount of bad karma. This powerful negative force has led to natural calamities and disasters. The cause of natural disasters lies in human actions. Our mindsets and behaviors are responsible for what the world is like today.

The Buddha came to the world to shed light on life's truths. He clearly taught us about life's impermanence, about the abundance of suffering in the world, about the emptiness of all things. He also pointed out a path to end that suffering.

But it's hard for many to awaken to the truths he taught. They continue to live blindly in pursuit of transient pleasures and are going the wrong direction in life.

All of us have a buddha nature and are capable of the same wisdom and awakening as the Enlightened One. If we can take the Buddha's teachings to heart, eliminate our unwholesome habits and tendencies, and stop being attached to our desires, our life will be blessed with peace and serenity. If we can turn inward and reflect, listen to our inner voice, and work on recovering our innate pure nature, we will stop being led astray by illusions.

I have often talked of fireflies lately. This kind of insect can glow in the dark and liven up the night with specks of light. Though their small twinkles of light cannot dispel all the darkness, they bring to my mind the vibrancy of nature and the beauty of the world. Examples of such vitality and beauty in the world make me ponder where the hope of humanity lies.

If there is to be hope for the world, we must have faith in ourselves, faith that we have the power to make a difference. Each and every one of us needs to spread good messages, do good deeds, and encourage and keep one another going. If we can do so, our world will never be devoid of hope. We have a collective responsibility to take care of the world we live in. Ask yourself: "Have I done my share? Have I fulfilled my responsibility?" We may have limited strength, but like the fireflies, we can all give off our flashes of light. Never underestimate yourself. Believe in your ability to give love. This is how we can all bring our light to the world.

Take stock of your life to see if you have put your time to good use by benefiting the world, or if you are just letting your time slip by in vain. If you find you are not doing enough, then step up your efforts. If you have already done a lot for the good of the world, remember that many people still need your help, and keep on going. We must all pitch in when it comes to doing good. Today's world needs us. Let us contribute what we can and live a life without regrets. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

January 2022



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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time, or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address, and telephone number.

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To read our magazine online, please visit our website: web.tzuchiculture.org.tw or scan this QR code:





Healthcare providers in a
COVID care unit at Taipei
Tzu Chi Hospital



Rising to Taiwan's COVID Crisis

By Zhang Yu-fan

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Taiwan faced its most severe challenge posed by the coronavirus in May 2021. Though largely spared from the global pandemic previously, the island saw its total number of cases spike from fewer than 1,500 to more than 10,000 in less than three weeks, from May 15 to June 3. The new cases were largely concentrated in Taipei and New Taipei City, severely testing the capacity of the two cities' healthcare systems. Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital rose to the crisis by expanding wards to make room for more COVID-19 patients. They were determined to help Taiwan ride out this viral crisis. They ended up being one of the hospitals in Taiwan taking in the most patients.



Riding Out the COVID Wave

Medical workers at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital hurry a coronavirus patient to a COVID care ward. When COVID cases began to climb sharply in Taiwan in mid-May 2021, hospital administrators met the crisis by creating more dedicated space for patients.







It's Everyone's Business to Ward Off the Virus

Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital assumed responsibility for an enhanced quarantine hotel at the end of May 2021. Medical staff was posted there for over 50 days to serve asymptomatic or mildly ill patients (left). Administrative workers at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital helped in the fight against the coronavirus by regularly sterilizing public areas and making face shields to ensure there was a steady supply (below).



One More Person Saved, One More Happy Family

By Zhang Yu-fan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo courtesy of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital

COVID cases in Taiwan jumped dramatically in mid-May 2021. Within a week, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital converted five more areas in the hospital into COVID care units, acting on the belief that each person saved results in one more happy family. The hospital also assumed responsibility for an enhanced quarantine hotel for patients with mild or no symptoms, set up a community screening station near the hospital's entrance, and helped staff five vaccine stations at Tzu Chi Jing Si Halls.

In early 2020, when Taiwan had reported fewer than 40 coronavirus cases, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital unwittingly admitted five COVID patients. As a precaution, 70 medical workers at the hospital who had been exposed to the patients were forced into isolation. Fortunately, no one ended up being infected, but the scare helped raise the hospital's vigilance against the threat of COVID-19. Realizing the need to better equip itself against the infection, the hospital completed a positive-negative pressure operating room in March 2021. This enabled it to better serve infected patients who needed surgery and at the same time offer better protection to health workers involved in the surgery. On May 27, not long after the facility was completed, an expectant mother diagnosed with the coronavirus underwent Caesarean surgery there.

When the pandemic flared up in Taiwan in mid-May 2021, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital quickly converted five more areas in the hospital into COVID care wards and reduced its non-emergency medical services to serve more COVID patients. Among the wards was an intensive care unit. The number of diagnosed cases surged from fewer than 1,500 to more than 5,000 in about a week, with more and more middle-aged and older people with multiple chronic illnesses falling victim to the infection. Because such patients were more likely to become seriously ill and require ventila-

tors, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital created a second intensive care unit devoted solely to COVID patients.

Many front-line medical workers, dedicated to taking care of COVID patients during the crisis, applied for dormitory space at the hospital to avoid taking the virus home. They kept in touch with and soothed their longings for their loved ones with video chats. Everyone avoided going out and about as much as possible. Those who worked in the emergency department and the COVID care units had to endure the discomfort of COVID swabs every week, but they willingly bore the tests.

Severely ill COVID patients could lose their ability to take care of themselves in an extremely short time. Brave and caring nurses were invaluable in such cases. They turned patients over in bed, tube-fed them, and even washed their heads and bodies to keep them clean. They also set up video chats for such patients so that they could meet their family members online. He Pei-rou (何佩柔), a head nurse, said that most patients in her COVID-19 care unit were middle-aged or older. Many weren't savvy technology users, and since their family members weren't allowed to come into the ward, she and her fellow workers provided support and company for them. With COVID keeping family members away, medical workers at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital filled the roles



Health professionals from Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital staff a temporary medical station at an enhanced quarantine hotel.

of surrogate family members, treating patients like family.

When hospital isolation wards in Taipei and New Taipei City began to reach their limit, the Taiwanese government decided to place coronavirus patients with mild or no symptoms in quarantine hotels called “enhanced centralized quarantine stations.” Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital took charge of one such hotel on May 31. They set up a temporary medical station and a command center in the hotel’s lobby and started posting medical staff there 24 hours a day. Nearly 70 healthcare providers served on a rotational basis at the hotel for more than 50 days. Of the on-site medical professionals, Dr. Chen Jia-hui (陳家輝), of general surgery, alone put in 216 hours. By the time the last patient left on July 22, they had served 594 people.

Healthcare workers on duty at the hotel video-chatted with patients twice a day to check on their condition. Patients had to regularly measure their own blood oxygen level, heart rate, and body temperature and report the numbers back to the medical workers on duty. When decreased blood oxygen levels, quickened heartbeat, or other medical issues were detected, patients were either rushed to Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital for treatment or provided with oxygen to ensure their safety.

Nurse Guo Huai-en (郭懷恩) works at the psychiatric ward at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. Though she volunteered to serve at the enhanced quarantine hotel, she felt the pressure of being near people diagnosed with the infection. To ease that stress, she told herself to focus on what she needed to do at each moment. Her approach worked

well: she never once regretted serving there, and was very happy whenever she saw a resident leave quarantine to go home. “The happy smiles on their faces touched me beyond measure,” said the nurse.

Cheng Ching-feng (鄭敬楓), deputy superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, coordinated triage at the hotel. He shared an anecdote about a child patient there. He said that Dr. Chao You-chen (趙有誠), the hospital’s superintendent, went to the hotel every day to extend care to the patients there and cheer them on via a public address system. When a child patient returned home after being released from quarantine, he told his family that a man had talked to him every day from the wall during his stay at the hotel. Everyone who heard this anecdote couldn’t help but smile. “Aside from being amusing, the story also reveals an especially heart-warming side of our service at the quarantine hotel,” said Cheng.

Superintendent Chao said that it was inevitable that hotel employees felt anxious when they learned that their hotel was serving COVID patients. He tried to alleviate their anxiety by assuring them, “We’ll treat you all like family!” Medical workers provided training for hotel employees and on-site police officers to help them better protect themselves against the coronavirus. Healthcare workers also gave these employees and police officers COVID shots and collected samples from them to be tested for the infection. The efforts and precautions were worth the time and energy, ensuring the safety and health of everyone serving at the hotel. ❀

We Are Not Heroes

Narrated by Chao You-chen, superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital

Compiled by Yang Jin-yan
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

The point of our battle against the coronavirus is not how many patients we have admitted or how many resources we've used. We're not trying to be heroes in this fight; we just want to do what we can. We don't want family members' hearts to break, and we want to take good care of their family for them.

A COVID-19 crisis started unfolding in Taiwan in mid-May 2021.

I remember that on May 9, 2021, we were in Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital's lobby, taking part in a Buddha Day ceremony and listening to a talk given by Dharma Master Cheng Yen. Though COVID had upended life in most other parts of the world, our life in Taiwan had remained relatively peaceful. However, it seemed just a moment later we found ourselves swept in a COVID storm.

In the second half of May and early part of June, Taiwan recorded a daily average of 400 to 500 new infections. Six thousand people were diagnosed with the coronavirus in less than two weeks. Most of the new cases were reported in Taipei and New Taipei City. Ambulance sirens were heard day and night, stirring up panic and anxiety. I'm very thankful to our Tzu Chi volunteers for helping us set up an outdoor COVID screening station near the entrance of our hospital in as short as two days and nights. This was in response to a huge demand for tests. Many people tested positive at that screening station.

Though we had set up COVID care units early on during the pandemic, we soon ran short of space. We decided to expand our facilities to accommodate more COVID patients, but with the epidemic raging, it was difficult to find workers willing to come into the hospital to set up more COVID care units for us. A shortage of building materials compounded our difficulties. Fortunately, Tzu Chi volunteer Lin Qing-hua (林

青華) brought his workers to our hospital to help us out. Even his daughter came to help. Lin was injured in the rush to get the facilities finished, but after his wound was bandaged, he went right on working. With the help of Lin and his team, our second intensive care unit (ICU), with a capacity of 33 beds, was soon completed for severely ill COVID patients.

We started taking part in a daily videoconference on May 23 with the team at Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien that was coordinating and organizing the foundation's anti-coronavirus efforts. Master Cheng Yen reminded us almost every day to be sure to properly wear our protective gear when we took care of patients. "You must be well protected to protect others," the Master said time and again. I could feel how worried she was about our safety.

I reiterated to my coworkers during our anti-coronavirus meetings at our hospital that it was our duty as health professionals to rise to this COVID challenge and do our best. I told everyone that behind every patient was a family and that we could prevent many heartbreaks by doing our best to save lives.

By September, we had cared for 456 COVID patients, 166 of whom had been admitted into the ICU. Some older patients suffered from severe shortness of breath; they felt very tired and decided against resuscitation. One such patient was a man in his 90s. Refusing to be intubated, he breathed his last beside his son, who was in his 70s and also a COVID patient. Some patients



received phone calls from other hospitals informing them of the deaths of their family members. All they could do was cry into their cell phones—they couldn't even go to their loved ones' deathbeds. They didn't know if they themselves would live to see tomorrow. There is no way to overstate the level of sadness and heartbreak brought on by this pandemic.

One of the patients admitted into our hospital was an 85-year-old man. He loved his wife very much. Despite being hard of hearing and nearly blind, he visited a store near Lungshan Temple in Wanhua, Taipei, to buy steamed stuffed buns for his wife, who had just had knee replacement surgery and was recuperating at home. Little did the man know he was exposing himself to grave danger. (Wanhua was on its way to becoming a COVID hotspot—some people there had already contracted the coronavirus at the time but didn't know it.) After his trip to Wanhua, he was diagnosed with COVID. Because his family couldn't tend to his needs at his bedside, the nurses at our hospital became like granddaughters to him, giving him support and cheering him on. The man

Chao You-chen, superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, is thankful to the entire staff at the hospital for taking good care of COVID patients, serving at an enhanced quarantine hotel, and staffing COVID vaccine stations.

told our nurses: "I must beat this illness. I have a wife to take care of."

Despite his strong will to live, his blood oxygen level and blood pressure plummeted one night. A nurse set his cell phone up so he could talk to his family. "Don't worry, grandpa," a family member said. "We'll take good care of grandma." He passed away that weekend. Our medical workers took his passing hard. How they had wished to send every patient home safe and happy.

He is family

The second half of May saw an influx of COVID patients to the emergency rooms of various hospitals, to the point that no emergency room could take any more patients. It was the same at our hospital. Even so, text messages

appealing for help never stopped coming in. Seeing how jam-packed our ER was, I suddenly had an idea: "Let's turn all available wards into ERs." So, just like that, we started sending people who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 to our wards for first aid. My reasoning was that with each patient we took in, we might be able to save one more person from the clutches of death.

A 27-year-old COVID patient had kidney issues and needed dialysis. He was also mentally and physically disabled. He had not had dialysis in two weeks when our medical staffers discovered him outside the emergency room. We put him on dialysis that night. Just a few days later, the young patient's condition had worsened to the point where he needed to be intubated and receive intensive care. We continued to provide dialysis after he was transferred to the ICU. Fortunately, his age gave him an advantage in his battle against COVID, and he was eventually transferred back into a regular COVID ward. He didn't have family around. The head nurse at his ward not only administered dialysis treatment but washed his hair and body, taking care of him as if he were her son. It wasn't until he was about to be discharged that a social worker at our hospital located his family. Sadly, his father had been unemployed for years and couldn't take care of him. Arrangements were thus made for the young man to be placed in a nursing home.

In late May, a COVID-19 positive expectant mother, 32 weeks into her pregnancy, underwent Caesarean surgery in the positive-negative pressure operating room in our hospital. This had been her first pregnancy, but the joy of being with

her first child was compromised by COVID. Her family members had all gone into isolation; she had arrived at our hospital alone with some simple luggage. It was easy to imagine her uneasiness and anxiety.

Our medical team called an emergency family meeting for her. Health professionals from obstetrics and gynecology, surgery, and pediatrics met her family online and assured them she would receive their best care at our hospital. "We see her as our family member," the team said. Uncertain if she would live to see her baby, the expectant mother recorded something for her baby before she was intubated.

On the day of the Caesarean surgery, a premature newborn weighing 1,565 grams was brought into the world amidst everyone's best wishes. The mother and daughter had both fared well. The first thing the mother did when she woke up was pick up her tablet computer to look at her baby. The love she had for her baby was really something to behold. Happily, they later both made it out of our hospital safe and healthy.

On May 28, something happened that left an indelible impression on our medical workers. Early that morning, a man's heartrending, thunderous cries were heard coming out from a COVID-19 care unit. The man's father had just died of COVID in another hospital. The two were very close; the man's mother had passed away when he was three years old, so he had been brought up alone by his father. About seven or eight years earlier, he had even donated part of his liver to his father. It broke the man's heart that his father had survived the major liver transplant

surgery only to succumb to the pandemic. Our nurses comforted him as best they could. They encouraged him to be strong for his three-year-old son, who was waiting for him to recover and come home. When the man was about to be discharged, he said he was deeply grateful for the care



A nurse in a COVID care unit at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital requested medical supplies by posting notes on a windowpane. Communicating their needs this way helped them reduce their trips into and out of the ward.

given to him by our medical team.

Another man, Mr. Cheng, 49, had long taken care of his mother, who was a dialysis patient. The two of them and Mr. Cheng's sister contracted the coronavirus one after another. When Cheng was admitted into our hospital, his mother phoned him from another hospital, saying to him:

"We're together in this fight. Let's do our best to get well." Sadly, she passed away some time later.

Cheng weighed 134 kilograms (295 pounds) and suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. His lungs turned white as his COVID condition deteriorated. He was moved into the ICU and put on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (better known as ECMO, a machine that takes over the work of the lungs and heart.) He even developed septic shock, but eventually recovered and made it out of the hospital. He said his time in the ICU was like being in a dream. All he could remember was Dr. Su Wen-lin (蘇文麟), director of the internal medicine ICU, performing phlegm suction procedures on him and wiping away his tears, and nurses cleaning him up after he had diarrhea.

Cheng's sister said that her father used to donate 300 New Taiwan dollars (US\$10) every month to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital as a gesture of support, but she had no idea Tzu Chi had a hospital in Taipei too. "I often received Dr. Su's emergency phone calls at night during my brother's hospitalization," she said. "It was as if the director didn't need to sleep at all." She expressed wishes that she and her brother could also help others in the future, just like what Tzu Chi volunteers had been doing.

We become stronger when we give

In our COVID wards, our nurses washed elderly patients, changed their diapers, and cleaned their lesions. They washed their hair too. "It's really nothing," they said. "We do that when we have a free moment at night." Though they made it sound like it was nothing, it took more than an hour to wash a patient's hair.

Among the COVID patients our hospital took in were people who were addicted to drugs or had dementia. Our medical workers needed to show special patience with these patients and



Mr. Zhuang, a COVID patient at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital who was about to be discharged, thanked a nurse for taking care of him. The nurse encouraged him to pay the love forward.

COURTESY OF TAIPEI TZU CHI HOSPITAL

calm them when they were agitated or displayed aggressive behaviors. One of the ways they soothed these patients was reading *Jing Si Aphorisms* with them. (*Jing Si Aphorisms* is a collection of short sayings by Master Cheng Yen.) Patients were obviously appreciative of our team's care for them. When they had recovered and were about to leave our hospital, some of them knelt down before our nurses to express their gratitude, while others took deep bows or gave our staffers big hugs. They had developed family-like bonds with our healthcare providers during their stay in our hospital.

According to media reports, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital was one of the hospitals in Taiwan that took in the most COVID patients during that outbreak. We were not trying to be heroes, we just wanted to do what we could. What's most important was that we learned during that critical time how to mindfully put our love into action. We knew Master Cheng Yen was worried about us and all patients. So we reminded each other to take good care of ourselves so we would be available to safeguard the health of every patient.

If we count the patients at our enhanced quarantine hotel, we ended up serving more than 900 patients during that critical period. What's more, no in-hospital infections occurred. I'm grateful for all our staff's work. We become stronger when we give. The pandemic will eventually be over, but we won't forget what we've learned. We will use what we've learned to make us stronger and better able to assume bigger responsibilities and safeguard lives. ❁

You're Not Alone

An Overview of Tzu Chi's Global Aid in 2021

Compiled by Yan Wan-ting

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Over 5.2 million people around the world had succumbed to COVID-19 by early December 2021. Despite vaccinations, breakthrough infections continued to put people at significant risk for infection. Even so, more and more countries decided to pivot in their response to the pandemic. Instead of eradicating the virus, they took the stance of learning to live with it. They lifted lockdowns, reopened borders, and eased travel rules to boost their economies. At the same time, Tzu Chi volunteers around the world continued to monitor the pandemic in their countries and offer help to the vulnerable. In addition to the challenges presented by the pandemic, 2021 saw our world beset by one natural disaster after another. Overcoming difficulties created by COVID-19, volunteers reached out to those affected, using their actions to show the less fortunate: "You're not alone."





In September 2021, tropical storm Dianmu triggered the worst flooding to hit low-lying regions in Lopburi Province, Thailand, in 20 years. Tzu Chi volunteers distributed food and cleaning implements to victims in three districts in October.

NATTAYA THANAKITTIPIHONG

Saving Lives Is As Urgent As Fighting Fires

Tzu Chi has provided aid in 126 countries and regions since it was founded, 24 of which were added in the last two years as a result of the pandemic. There were not even Tzu Chi volunteers in most of those new countries or regions. How did the foundation manage to overcome such a lack of manpower and get help to those in need amidst lockdowns and closed borders?

The novel coronavirus started spreading across the globe in early 2020, sparing no corner of the globe and impacting every economy in its path. The rollout of vaccines a year after the infection started brought a glimmer of hope that the end of the pandemic was in sight. But months later, in April 2021, the pandemic hit a new peak. Twenty million new cases were diagnosed in 30 days, over 900,000 of them in a single day, April 23. One third of those new infections were reported in India.

India had been among the countries hit the hardest by the infection since it had started sweeping the globe. The situation there was brought under control for a time, thanks to the government's strict disease control measures, but daily case numbers began to rise sharply in March 2021 as restrictions were eased and as political and religious events brought out large crowds. More than six million cases were diagnosed and 45,000 people died in April alone. The rapid surge in confirmed cases overwhelmed the country's healthcare system. Hospital beds, medications, and ventilators were in severe short supply. Many of those who died perished as a result of a short supply of oxygen. Families scrambled to buy oxygen cylinders on the black market for their loved ones. The news coming from India made the hearts of people around the world wrench in pain and sorrow.

A number of countries in Southeast Asia saw a resurgence of confirmed cases around the same time. One of the contributing factors was the rise of the highly transmissible Delta variant. Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines were

among the countries that experienced a resurgence. In response, Tzu Chi donated medical supplies, helped with vaccination programs, and provided food relief to the underprivileged in these countries.

At the same time, Tzu Chi launched an aid program dedicated to helping people in seven countries in South and Southeast Asia suffering because of the pandemic. These seven countries were India and nearby countries, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Laos. Food was purchased locally to distribute to the needy to help them through this difficult time. To address shortages, medical equipment and supplies were donated to healthcare institutions.

Among the medical equipment donated, oxygen plants, designed to generate oxygen, were the most special items. Tzu Chi had never donated such equipment before, but foundation personnel discovered that the equipment was badly needed after conferring with health authorities, medical institutions, and charity organizations in India and Nepal. Because hospitals were struggling with a short oxygen supply, the foundation decided to purchase and donate the equipment to hospitals in India and Nepal to help them better care for patients. Life is precious. As the Chinese saying goes, "Saving lives is as urgent as fighting fires."

Donating the oxygen plants required planning and coordination. The amount of medical oxygen each hospital needed was different, and there were also installation requirements to consider. To ensure that the equipment donated really met the

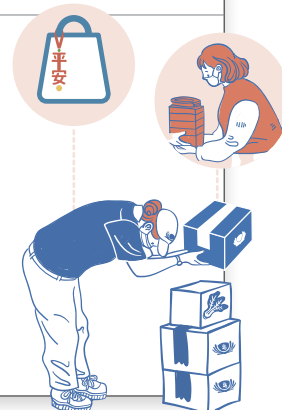
A Summary of Tzu Chi's Global COVID Aid from Jan. 2020 to Nov. 2021

✓ Medical Equipment and Other Anti-Coronavirus Items:

- The foundation provided medical equipment and other anti-coronavirus items to 8,586 organizations in 95 countries and areas.
- A total of 48.63 million items were donated, including oxygen plants, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, protective clothing, face shields, and other items needed to fight the coronavirus.

✓ Food and Other Forms of Aid:

The foundation provided food and other forms of assistance in 44 countries and regions, enough to benefit 3.9 million families or 16.1 million individuals.



needs of the beneficiary hospitals, Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien formed a team to handle the purchase of the oxygen plants. The team enlisted the help of experts and reviewed product specifications such as the make, model number, storage capacity, and other technical details to make final decisions. Finally, they arranged for flights to transport the equipment.

In 2020, Tzu Chi worked with 12 organizations in India to help people financially impacted by COVID-19. The organizations that partnered with Tzu Chi included ABM Samaj Prabodhan Sanstha (a Buddhist non-profit), the Camillians (a Roman Catholic missionary order based in Italy), the Missionaries of Charity (a Catholic religious congregation established by Mother Teresa), and several Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. A total of 140,000 food packages were distributed to needy families as a result of this cooperation. When the pandemic took a turn for the worse in India in April 2021, Tzu Chi continued to work with these partners and other like-minded people to distribute more aid. All told, more than 329 organizations spread across India received aid from Tzu Chi during this time.

Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, led a team to organize the foundation's COVID support. It was a mission riddled with challenges, whether it be from purchasing the aid, transporting it, or getting it delivered. The deputy CEO recalled that when the coronavirus first broke out in China, catching everyone off guard, Tzu Chi quickly obtained personal protective equipment and other anti-coronavirus supplies in other countries and sent them to areas hit hard by the infection to help China combat the disease. Later, in March 2020, when other

countries began to experience a surge in cases, the foundation once again jumped into action to prepare and donate needed supplies to those countries. When COVID variants started appearing in September 2020, Tzu Chi took preemptive action and warehoused anti-coronavirus supplies in countries across several continents to extend a helping hand as quickly as possible. When the pandemic accelerated in Asia in April 2021, the items donated by the foundation included specialized medical equipment. Over the course of the pandemic, Tzu Chi has donated more than 10,000 oxygen concentrators alone.

Since its founding in 1966, Tzu Chi has provided assistance to 126 countries and areas, 24 of which were newly added in the last two years as a result of the pandemic. There were no Tzu Chi volunteers in most of those new countries. How did the foundation manage to get relief to those in need in those countries amidst lockdowns and closed borders? Simon Shyong explained they acted on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's instructions: they had sought out people and organizations that could help Tzu Chi get its assistance to the needy in those countries. There was no challenge too big when everyone combined their resources and worked together. Technology had come in very handy in the process too, enabling Tzu Chi personnel to meet partnering individuals or organizations online to talk things over and arrange related matters.

By adapting to changing circumstances, proactively seeking opportunities to help, and partnering with like-minded organizations—even if they espoused different religious beliefs than Buddhism—Tzu Chi was able to reach and help people the world over. ☸



Indonesia

Outpouring of Support Amidst the Pandemic

Text and photo provided by Tzu Chi Indonesia

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

One feels small and insignificant faced with the massive impact of the coronavirus crisis. But the pandemic also brought forth an outpouring of love, enabling support to reach the underprivileged across the nation.

According to information released in April 2021 by Lapor COVID-19, an independent data initiative in Indonesia, nearly a thousand doctors and nurses in the nation had died by that time from COVID. Though more than a year had passed since the infection broke out, no one could have predicted that another wave was just around the corner. The large number of people returning home in mid-May 2021 for the Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, ushered in a second wave of the coronavirus in Indonesia. It was exacerbated by the rapid transmission of the Delta variant. The peak came in mid-July, with more than 50,000 new cases reported each day. One-fourth of those new cases occurred in Jakarta, the capital. It wasn't until late August that the daily infection rate began to significantly decline. Even so, the country's case count had topped four million by August 24.

The sharp spike in confirmed cases impacted Indonesia's medical system. The emergency room at Tzu Chi Great Love Hospital in Cengkareng, West Jakarta, was overwhelmed. Dr. Adrianus Kanasis, leader of the anti-COVID team at the hospital, said that his cell phone rang incessantly every day during that time, from early morning to midnight. Some people were calling to inquire if they could get a bed in the hospital; others were seeking help because they or their loved ones had contracted COVID-19. Kanasis worked long hours through those days, and if being overworked

wasn't bad enough, his brother and his entire family were diagnosed with the disease and hospitalized. That critical time was hard on Kanasis, but he wasn't the only medical worker mentally and physically exhausted. The situation was typical among those in his line of work.

In response to the second wave, Indonesia Tzu Chi Hospital, a new Tzu Chi medical facility originally scheduled to open for a trial run on October 1, set up a pandemic center and started serving COVID patients on June 14. The center opened with 56 beds, all of which were occupied within a day. An even greater challenge came when one third of the medical personnel at Tzu Chi Great Love Hospital and Indonesia Tzu Chi Hospital were diagnosed with COVID, one after another. Tzu Chi Indonesia quickly offered a vacant building at Tzu Chi Great Love Hospital—slated to be used as a dormitory for the hospital's nursing staff—to temporarily serve as an isolation facility for Tzu Chi employees and other patients with mild symptoms.

Patients had a hard time getting a hospital bed with the medical system in Indonesia overwhelmed by the second wave. The demand for medical oxygen outstripped the supply too, resulting in patient deaths. Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan promptly bought 5,000 oxygen concentrators to help. The equipment was purchased in China and transported via chartered flights to Indonesia, then sent by Tzu Chi Indonesia to medical institutions across the nation.



“No one could have known that Indonesia would have suffered such a huge impact from the pandemic,” said Sugianto Kusuma (郭再源), deputy CEO of Tzu Chi Indonesia. “Master Cheng Yen has said this pandemic is like a grand lesson for us all, helping us to realize how small and insignificant human beings are. For Tzu Chi Indonesia, however, the pandemic also brought forth an outpouring of love.” Kusuma explained that when the coronavirus infection broke out in March 2020, many entrepreneurs in Indonesia responded to Tzu Chi’s appeal and donated money to buy ventilators and personal protective equipment (PPE) for front-line workers. “Our hearts ached when we learned that many health professionals were wearing raincoats because they were short on protective clothing,” said the deputy CEO. After buying desperately needed medical equipment and PPE, Tzu Chi worked with the military and police to deliver the items to over a thousand hospitals and 284 government health agencies in 25 provinces.

The donation of medical supplies and equipment aside, Tzu Chi Indonesia has also been helping the underprivileged weather the pandemic. In February 2021, to mark the Chinese New Year, Tzu

On October 5, 2021, with the help of maritime police officers, Tzu Chi volunteers in Pekanbaru, the capital of the province of Riau, distributed 300 bags of rice, each weighing ten kilograms, to fishermen and other laborers who lived along the Siak River and whose livelihoods had been affected by the pandemic.

Chi and the business sector together launched a project to give out a million gift packs, each containing a ten-kilogram (22-pound) bag of rice and 20 medical masks, to destitute families. Another aid project was started by the foundation in August to buy vegetarian boxed meals from vendors impacted by the pandemic and give them to the needy. As of October 2021, more than 32,000 meals had been purchased and distributed to those in need.

Isha, a vendor in Surabaya, Indonesia’s second largest city, was one of those who benefited from this project. “When I received Tzu Chi’s order,” he said, “I was so happy I couldn’t fall asleep. I kept wondering if this was reality or a dream. I decided to give a discount so I could help others too. I hope I can help spread happiness through this Tzu Chi activity.”





Helping With an Oxygen Deficiency

Information provided by Huang Lu-fa and Chen Yong-hua

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

A third wave of the coronavirus erupted in Myanmar in mid-2021, resulting in a deficiency of oxygen supplies and causing the public to panic. Many Tzu Chi volunteers were also diagnosed with the infection. A shortage of manpower presented a tough challenge as volunteers mobilized to organize and distribute aid. Despite the challenges, they continued to help those in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar took a drastic turn for the worse in June 2021. Hospitals were filled to capacity in a few short days, stretching oxygen supplies thin. Some patients were forced to go into isolation at home and treat themselves with oxygen they had obtained themselves. Outside oxygen-producing factories, long lines of people, disregarding curfews and COVID precautionary protocols, waited anxiously to buy their own private supplies. A sense of panic pervaded society.

Daw Thida Khin (李金蘭), head of Tzu Chi Myanmar, recalled that difficult time. By June and July, the pandemic had pushed the nation's healthcare system over the brink. The demand for oxygen concentrators and other equipment spiked. People were knocking on the door of the Tzu Chi office, begging for the foundation to provide them with oxygen supplies to save their family. Not long after the surge in cases, many Tzu Chi volunteers themselves were diagnosed with the infection, making it even harder for them to provide relief. "Myanmar has been plagued by natural and man-made disasters since 2008," said Daw Thida Khin. "With support from Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers around the world, we've managed to conduct many large-scale distributions of rice and rice seeds for the needy. Never before have we encountered such difficulties as we did this time in providing assis-

tance to the needy, because many volunteers and their family members also fell victim to the disease."

Diagnosed cases among volunteers and staffers started popping up in late June. In response, Tzu Chi Myanmar provided isolation space for those volunteers and employees who needed it. Aye Nandar Aung (郭寶鈺), deputy head of Tzu Chi Myanmar, was among those infected. As soon as she recovered, she contacted doctors in her community and arranged treatment for her fellow volunteers who had been diagnosed with COVID-19. When the volunteers had regained their health, they would not go home but instead threw themselves into Tzu Chi's work. They joined other volunteers to distribute food to the vulnerable. From the time the pandemic started to October 2021, Tzu Chi Myanmar provided enough food to benefit more than 100,000 households.

On July 10, 2021, volunteer U Kyaw Khin (林銘慶) personally visited Yangon Region's Phaung Gyi Hospital, Myanmar's largest medical facility for the isolation and treatment of COVID patients. The day after the visit, he applied to Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan for a large amount of oxygen concentrators and cylinders to help Myanmar ride out the challenges posed by the pandemic. The application was instantly granted. U Kyaw Khin followed up by asking Dr. Than Than Aye,



Oxygen concentrators and cylinders donated by Tzu Chi were delivered to remote villages, mountainous areas, communities, and hospitals to help save lives.

PHOTO ABOVE BY YI MON THAN; RIGHT PHOTO BY NAY THURA



the superintendent of Grand Hantha Hospital, to help take care of the import procedures of the medical equipment.

Much to everyone's surprise, U Kyaw Khin himself was diagnosed with COVID-19 in mid-July. Many of his relatives and friends fell victim to the disease too, one after the other. Some even died. U Kyaw Khin often had trouble falling asleep at night, having witnessed firsthand the suffering caused by the disease and worried about the collapse of the nation's medical system. He performed rapid COVID-19 testing on himself every day, hoping that the result would eventually come back negative, leaving him free to go out to volunteer and take care of other important business. He only felt a sense of relief when he learned that the medical equipment he had applied for was on its way to Myanmar. "There were no flights available when we first tried to bring in the equipment by air, so we were put on the waiting list. But because the hospitals here desperately needed the equipment, we were really worried. The difficulties we encountered in the process were numerous. It was like fighting a war.

You had to be at the ready all the time."

Even though he could not go out, he didn't sit around idly. He phoned hospital administrators and government officials every day to determine the number of oxygen concentrators needed and arrange for their transportation. He became even busier after he recovered—constantly taking care of relief work. Though he was very busy, it pleased him more than anything that he could contribute his bit during this difficult time and help relieve suffering.

Eventually, all the 1,759 oxygen concentrators and 658 oxygen cylinders provided by Tzu Chi headquarters arrived in different shipments in Myanmar. They were then delivered to hospitals, isolation centers, and monasteries across the country. Some of the oxygen concentrators were placed in the Tzu Chi office in Yangon to be loaned out to community residents for free. People who borrowed the equipment returned it as soon as they could so that it could be used to save more people. Daw Thida Khin said, "We've saved nearly 2,000 people. The value of our equipment is beyond measure." ❀



The Taste of Rice

Information provided by Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

A little girl was so happy to receive a bag of rice from Tzu Chi she used it as a pillow, falling soundly asleep.

The pandemic in Malaysia became very severe in July 2021. It peaked in August with nearly 25,000 new cases recorded in a single day. The Movement Control Order was lifted and reinstated repeatedly, impacting businesses and industries across the board. Low-income families were hit especially hard and had difficulties putting food on their table. A social movement called the White Flag emerged in the midst of these dire circumstances to enable struggling Malaysians to ask for help. Food banks were also set up to aid the needy. The Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor branch responded by launching a food care project for communities. From July to September, enough food to help 45,000 families was given out at more than 40 locations.

One of the mothers helped by Tzu Chi had been using flour to make various foods for her

family, her rice supply long since depleted. At first her children dreamed of having rice to eat, but that dream nearly faded away as the pandemic dragged on and the family struggled to make ends meet. So, when the family received some food from Tzu Chi, among which was a five-kilogram (11-pound) bag of rice, they were overjoyed. When a volunteer phoned the family afterwards to check on them, the mother said happily, "My youngest daughter was so happy with the bag of rice, she used it as a pillow and fell soundly asleep."

On September 10, volunteer Yap Poh Wee (葉寶蔚) received a message on her cell phone from a Burmese refugee, Samira: "Do you know of any place where I can apply for free food? We have only half a can of powdered milk left at home. My husband and I are waiting to get our second COVID shots, so we can't go look for a job yet." Upon receiving the message, Yap applied for Samira to a Tzu Chi food care project for refugees. As soon as she received the gift vouchers intended for Samira, she rushed to her home to deliver them.

Yap had also helped Samira obtain financial aid from Tzu Chi a couple of months earlier, in July. Since the pandemic was bad at the time, Yap knew that it would be a hassle to get food at a store, so when she and other volunteers delivered the financial aid to Samira, they also brought her food and other essentials donated from their own homes. They donated baby diapers, face masks, canned food, vegetables, instant noodles, and eggs. Samira burst into tears



Samira (middle) burst into tears when she saw the food delivered by Tzu Chi volunteers.

LIN ZHEN SHENG

when she saw the gifts prepared by the volunteers.

Samira left Myanmar for Malaysia 13 years ago. She met her future husband in Malaysia and started a family with him. The couple never asked for help from others until the pandemic, which hit them hard. They couldn't pay their rent and their children were starving. At their wits' ends, they sought help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "An official there called me back and told me there was a charity organization that could help me," Samira recalled. She contacted the charity organization and was surprised by how quickly the volunteers arrived at her home. She was even more surprised when she learned that the organization was the very one and the same that had provided her free medical treatment at a free clinic in Kuala Lumpur.

There are more than 170,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR in Malaysia. With no legal identity, they were hard pressed to get by, even before the coronavirus outbreak. The pandemic just added insult to their financial injury—their income was cut off when the Movement Control Order was enacted and they couldn't go out to work.

Seeing the need, Tzu Chi and the UNHCR co-launched a program in April 2020 to help refugees cope with the crisis. The UN agency provided the relief funds and lists of potential refugees for help, and Tzu Chi volunteers assessed the refugees' conditions and delivered cash to their homes if their aid was approved. Aid was given out every three months under the program, for a maximum of nine months.

Volunteers learned about the plight of many refugees as a result of the program. Some had been evicted from their rentals because they couldn't afford their rent, and quite a few others were running out of food supplies at home. In



The Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Kuala Lumpur offers COVID-19 shots to refugees.

ZHUANG GUI HE

August 2021, Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor started another care program for refugees, offering gift vouchers to be used at designated stores. Upon receiving their gift vouchers, a mother and son purchased two bags of rice along with other food. With tears coursing down their cheeks, they said, "We've been getting by on just one meal every other day for the last two months. Never once have we felt full during all that time. But that will change tonight. We'll fry up some eggs to go with rice. We'll finally be able to eat our fill."

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Kuala Lumpur has remained open during the pandemic. Dr. Foo Seay Liang (符之良), the director of the free clinic, said: "It's not easy for refugees to get healthcare. If we closed, what would they do?" The free clinic not only continues to provide treatment for refugees during the pandemic—they also arrange for chronic condition medications to be delivered to refugees' homes. They also offer free COVID screening and vaccinations to make it easier for refugees to return to work and sustain their livelihoods. ❀

A Pictorial Summary of Tzu Chi's



1. A magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck Haiti on August 14, killing more than 2,000 people and destroying or damaging nearly 130,000 buildings. In response to the major disaster, Tzu Chi combined forces with local religious organizations to launch large-scale distributions in hard-hit areas. One of the distributions was held on October 1 in Beaumont. A total of 2,100 families received rice, other food items, and family medical kits.

KEZIAH JEAN

2. Hurricane Ida made landfall in the U.S.A. in late August. A state of emergency was declared in New York City as the city battled record-breaking rainfall and flooding. The first floors or basements of buildings were severely flooded; some people perished before they could escape to safety. Tzu Chi volunteers in New York City reached out to victims by providing them with cash cards. This picture shows a survivor moved to tears by Tzu Chi's aid.

HANNAH WHISENANT

Major Post-Disaster Aid in 2021



3. Rioting and looting occurred in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces in July. Durban was among the areas devastated. Prices skyrocketed and people lost their jobs, making getting by even more difficult than usual. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered rice and other items to 141 community hot food stations. They also visited and provided care and aid to people in dire need of help.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI DURBAN

4. Days of heavy rains battered Shanxi Province in China in early October, affecting more than 1.75 million people. Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized in the immediate aftermath to assess damage and provide aid. On October 12, they delivered Tzu Chi folding beds to a temporary shelter at Fenggu Elementary School in the city of Jinzhong and helped set up the beds. They followed up with more help, including distributing supplies in Laiyuan Township in Jinzhong in late October, aiding 1,400 people.

LI LIXIN

Syrian Refugees Give Back

Text and photos by Mohammed Nimr AlJamal and Ahmed Seyhi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

"It's finally time for us to give back!" exclaimed students and faculty at El Menahil International School in Turkey. They were referring to money they had donated to help Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan purchase COVID vaccines. Such vaccines would help accelerate Taiwan's vaccination drive. The students and teachers had raised the money to thank Tzu Chi for helping them after they had fled the war in their home country Syria.

September 6, 2021 was payday for the teaching and administrative staff at El Menahil International School in Istanbul, Turkey. A significant event was also taking place on this day: faculty members were making donations to help Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan purchase and donate COVID vaccines, which would in turn speed up Taiwan's vaccination program. Teachers expressed their happiness and joy at being able to repay the foundation for helping them and their fellow Syrian refugees over the years. Magd Mohammed Bagdadi, one of the teachers, said, "Tzu Chi has shown so much care for us over the years, providing us with free medical treatment and financial aid and helping us with our education. We must repay them for their kindness to convey our deep feelings of gratitude to them."

Zekeriya Fustik, another teacher, had taught in Syria for over 40 years. He felt a range of emotions at being able to work as a teacher again in Turkey. "No matter how much we donate," he said, "we can never adequately thank Tzu Chi for standing with us over the years."

The amounts of money teachers and administrative staffers at El Menahil donated ranged from 200 to 600 lira (US\$16 to 48). Faisal Hu (胡光中), the head of Tzu Chi Turkey, said that the average pay of teachers at the school was 3,000 to 4,000 lira (US\$242 to 322), so the money they donated was

not a trivial amount. They felt the need to donate because "having experienced love from Taiwanese people, they must seize every chance to give back."

Making charity a habit

El Menahil is a school for Syrian refugee children from elementary to high school. It was established by Tzu Chi and the government of the Sultangazi district of Istanbul in January 2015. Tzu Chi pays students' tuition and hires and pays qualified Syrians to teach. The school was renamed El Menahil International School in 2018 after it was accredited by AdvanceED, an American accrediting agency. Graduates can obtain diplomas acknowledged by the United States and Turkey.

In addition to supporting the school, Tzu Chi regularly helps 6,000 Syrian refugee families in Turkey. Faisal Hu said that large crowds were prohibited from gathering due to social distancing guidelines after the coronavirus pandemic started, but volunteers never stopped distributing monthly financial aid to the families Tzu Chi was helping support. Instead of holding distribution events, volunteers delivered the aid directly to the homes of the needy.





Tzu Chi reinstated on-site distributions in September 2021. By that time the COVID vaccination rate in Turkey had reached 70 percent, and many precautionary restrictions had been lifted. Volunteers completed 29 distribution events in two weeks, giving out cash cards to 6,000 families. Besides helping the households Tzu Chi had already been supporting, the foundation offered aid to refugee families who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Zi Shan was a school principal in Syria, but that career was cruelly ended by the civil war. Her house was destroyed and her husband was kidnapped. Sadly, he's not been heard from since. She and her two children fled illegally to Turkey in 2013. Because no school would hire her as a teacher, she was forced for a time to work as a cleaning lady. In 2017, she learned about Tzu Chi from a neighbor, and has since been receiving financial aid from the foundation. In addition to providing her with monetary assistance, volun-

When students at El Menahil International School returned to school in September 2021 after the pandemic had eased, they donated their pocket money to help Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan purchase COVID vaccines to help speed up Taiwan's vaccination program.

teers prepared a wardrobe, cupboard, and cooking stove for her and her children and moved the items into their nearly empty rental unit. Zi Shan said, "My children have no memory of their father; the Tzu Chi foundation is like their other parent."

Zi Shan is in poor health and has no steady income from work, but she still teaches her children to save their spare change in a coin bank to donate to Tzu Chi. When she took the coin bank to a Tzu Chi distribution to donate the money inside, she encouraged her fellow refugees to make charity a habit and help make a difference



in the lives of other needy people. Touched by her words, many donated to Tzu Chi as well.

Her younger son, Sameh, transferred to El Menahil International School in 2021. He excels in school and dreams of becoming a dentist. “My second dream is to become a volunteer at El Menahil,” said Sameh. “I want to do good things, just like what Mr. Faisal Hu has been doing for us.”

Students contributing

The Turkish government instantly ordered all schools to close after the first confirmed coronavirus case appeared in Turkey in March 2020, with the exception of those catering to students with special needs. Teachers at El Menahil went to school as usual to teach, but students stayed home and started learning remotely. After 18 months of online learning, El Menahil students returned to school to resume in-person classes on September 7, 2021. The children were excited. One said, “Using a cell phone to attend classes is bad for the eyes. I’ve also missed my teachers. I love my school. I’m also glad I can finally see my friends.” Another said, “I’m thrilled to be back in school after one and a half years and see my teachers. I feel they have become more beautiful.”

When the faculty at El Menahil learned about Tzu Chi’s effort to purchase and donate vaccines in July 2021, they expressed their wish to help by donating money to the foundation. They fulfilled their wish on September 6, 2021—the very day they were paid.

Students returned to school with more than just their school bags—they brought their coin banks as well. They donated the money to support Tzu Chi’s effort to purchase COVID vaccines for Taiwan. “I want to repay Tzu Chi for what they have done for us,” said Ahmet. “What I gave is nothing compared with what they have done to support us, but I’ll keep doing what I can.”

Fatima Betul is another student at El Menahil. Her father was killed in the war. She now lives with her mother and two younger sisters. Her family receives long-term aid from Tzu Chi too. She said that though they do not do well financially, they have learned from Tzu Chi the importance of giving. “We hope to convey a message of love and peace through our giving,” the girl said. “We embrace sincere love and stand by members of our Tzu Chi family. We hope to help purchase



vaccines for our dear brothers and sisters in Taiwan.” She stressed that Tzu Chi has been helping Syrians and others in need around the world. “Our love is given in response to their kind help to us.”

Since they started, teachers and students at El Menahil have donated more than 20,000 U.S. dollars to help Tzu Chi purchase vaccines. Faisal Hu said, “Some might wonder why we solicit or accept donations from refugees, given that they have their own economic struggles,” said Hu. “But the message we want to send is that the heart behind the gift is what matters, not the amount donated. When they drop money into a coin bank to donate, they change from people who receive to people who give. This can transform their lives.”

This was not the first time teachers and students at El Menahil had donated to Tzu Chi to help with its work. They’ve also donated to help victims of major natural disasters in Taiwan, as well as survivors of Cyclone Idai, which devastated parts of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi in 2019. What’s more, they took the initiative themselves to donate on those occasions.

Cuma Serya, the principal of El Menahil

Students in Taiwan receive Pfizer-BioNTech (BNT) COVID-19 shots donated by Tzu Chi, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), and the Yonglin Foundation. In the doses is love from Syrian refugees who donated to Tzu Chi to help with the foundation’s purchase of BNT vaccines. Tzu Chi, TSMC, and Yonglin together donated 15 million BNT doses to Taiwan.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

International School, is from Syria. He said that the donation for the vaccines this time had a special significance for them. “Since we met Tzu Chi seven years ago, we’ve been eagerly waiting for a chance to repay the kind-hearted people in Taiwan for never leaving us on our own and for doing all they can to help displaced Syrians.” This was the chance they had been waiting for.

“Our small donations carry our love and gratitude for Tzu Chi,” said the principal. He remarked that they willingly parted with their money because they cared for the lives and safety of their fellow brothers and sisters in Taiwan. “Your lives are our lives, and your safety is our safety because we are brothers and sisters, because we are family.”



A Happy Donor

Narrated by Xu Xiao-feng

Compiled by Wu Hui-li

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

I know the pain of being infected with COVID-19—I've contracted it myself. The experience brought home to me the importance of getting vaccinated against the virus. Even though I had been a blue-collar worker and hadn't made much money, I decided to donate a million Taiwanese dollars to Tzu Chi to help the foundation purchase COVID vaccines.

“COVID-19! Make way!” yelled several health workers in protective clothing as they pushed me from an emergency room down a hallway and into a dedicated elevator for COVID patients. I was lying on a gurney and covered with a clear plastic isolation shield. Emerging from the elevator a moment later, I saw a sign looming ahead: Intensive Care Unit (ICU). “Oh my heavens!” I suddenly thought. “Will I survive the disease and make it safely out?”

As a Tzu Chi commissioner, I had volunteered at a Tzu Chi hospital before. I had even served in an ICU and knew what it was like inside. Patients there were hooked up to IV tubes and connected to all sorts of monitoring devices. They couldn't even get out of their beds. The ICUs are for seriously ill people, but I had only a slight cough. What was I doing there? Why is COVID so bad and fearful? Unable to resolve these questions in my mind, I began to panic a little.

Aside from sleeping and eating, my time in the ICU consisted of staring at the ceiling. My thoughts often turned to how my family and I had been diagnosed with the coronavirus.

On May 29, 2021, a family member of mine learned from a phone call that he was required to practice 14 days of self-health management because a colleague had been diagnosed with COVID-19. (The guidelines for self-health management include avoiding gatherings, always wearing a

mask when away from home, etc.) Taiwan was experiencing an outbreak of the disease at the time. To be on the safe side, I asked my entire family to be tested for the virus. Afterwards, my youngest son learned from a National Health Insurance app that my husband had tested positive for COVID. He tearfully broke the news to me, then asked: “What should we do?” I comforted him and told him not to be afraid. I said that the first order of business was for us to stay away from my husband. I suggested to my son that he sleep in a room upstairs and let his dad sleep in a room one floor down, while I'd sleep on the sofa in the living room and keep an eye on my husband.

My husband was told to quarantine at home until the department of health made further arrangements for him. During this time, I made sure to sterilize every place he passed or touched with disinfectant spray. I was extra cautious. But despite my precautions, as soon as my husband was taken away to a quarantine facility, I began to experience cold symptoms and felt very tired. I called a government hotline for infectious diseases and told them I wanted to take another COVID test. The result came back positive this time. That was on June 7. The very next day, I was driven to a quarantine facility for isolation. On June 16, due to inadequate blood oxygen levels, I was transferred to an ICU at Far Eastern Memorial Hospital in New Taipei City.

Several other loved ones of mine were also diagnosed with COVID-19, one after another. Three of them were sent to a quarantine facility run by Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital and received great care. (The hospital had assumed responsibility for the facility during the outbreak at the request of the New Taipei City government.) Besides three daily vegetarian meals designed by nutritionists, they were given Jing Si Herbal Tea—a health drink containing an effective mixture of herbal medicines developed by Tzu Chi in response to COVID-19. Physicians from Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital contacted them several times via video-conferencing technology even after they were released from quarantine to inquire after their condition. My family was impressed by Tzu Chi's care for them.

I consider myself fortunate that I had the experience of volunteering at a hospital. It helped me remain calm when COVID hit my family. Another blessing was that all the members of my family diagnosed with the infection were asymptomatic. I couldn't imagine what it would have been like if any of them had taken seriously ill or worse. Whenever I thought of the time during which our happy family was forced apart by COVID-19, my heart ached and I couldn't stop from crying.

In the ICU, I listened to the doctors and lay prone on the bed as part of the treatment. The medical team used a high-frequency chest wall oscillation device to remove mucus from my airways, and soon my blood oxygen levels improved. Four days later, a doctor said to me, "Your response has been very good. You are now well enough to be transferred to a regular ward." The good news instantly perked me up.

The day after I was transferred out of the ICU, I received a phone call from Master De Huai (德懷) of the Jing Si Abode, conveying Master Cheng Yen's care for me. I received well-wishes from a staffer at the Tzu Chi Department of Religious Affairs and several other phone calls from fellow volunteers as well. The Abode even gifted me some Jing Si Herbal Tea. Such kind gestures from so many people touched a deep chord in me.

On July 1, I was finally released from quarantine and free to go home. When I was about to leave the hospital, I gave a deep bow to the medical team who had taken care of me to express my gratitude to them. One of them said, "Ma'am, you don't need to bow. We were just doing what we should do." "Actually, I had to," I said in response. "You're all risking your lives to take care of patients like me. I can't thank you enough."

Some people avoid people like me, people who once had COVID-19. They think that we might still pass the virus to them, even though we have fully recovered from the disease. This is a misconception. In fact, people like us have developed COVID antibodies. I'm more worried about those who haven't received their vaccinations against the infection.

Having suffered from COVID, I realize the importance of getting inoculated. That's why when I learned that Tzu Chi was purchasing COVID vaccines to help speed up Taiwan's inoculation drive, I suggested to my husband that we donate a million Taiwanese dollars (US\$33,000) to the foundation to help with the effort. "This past year has been a disturbing one due to COVID-19," I said to him. "When we first got married, we had nothing. We didn't even dare to dream that we might one day have our own place and a car. But now we have them all. Master Cheng Yen made the decision to buy the vaccines because she wanted to help save lives. Our family knows better than most other families the pain of being infected with COVID. If we donate the money, we can help many people, including our own family."

I broached this subject several times with my husband, but he always remained silent. I understood his concerns. We were both blue-collar workers when we were younger, and had scrimped and saved to have the money we have now. A security guard now, my husband used to construct formwork at construction sites. I used to work at a factory and I became a cleaning lady when the factory moved abroad. I only retired when my daughter-in-law had her second child so that I could baby-sit the little one.

The idea of donating a million Taiwanese dollars to Tzu Chi came to me during my hospitalization with COVID-19. At the time, I didn't know for sure if I'd survive the disease, but the experience of being infected fueled my desire to give. Thankfully, my husband later came around to my idea.

Master Cheng Yen often reminds us to tally the value of our lives. I don't have any specialized skills to contribute to society—all I can do is donate some money. Though our money was hard-earned and took us a long time to save, I knew I'd regret it if I didn't donate the million dollars. Now that I've made the donation, I feel a great sense of fulfillment. It feels great to be alive. Best of all, I'm happy I didn't wait until it was too late to do good. ❀

Reduce Your “Foodprint”

By Ng Hooi Lin

Abridged and translated by Rose Ting

Photo by Huang Xiao-zhe

It takes a lot of energy to get food from the farm to the table. When we prevent food from going to waste, we save not only food but energy as well. When eating out, you can prevent waste by ordering just the right amount. It's up to all of us to eat wisely.

My fellow dietician friends and I put a premium on not consuming too many calories. When we eat, we try to eat until we are 70 percent full.

Some friends, however, tend to eat too much when they eat out. When they go to a restaurant and see the enticing pictures on the menu, they can't resist the temptation of ordering each kind of food—without considering whether they'll be able to finish it. As a result, it often happens that they can't finish what they order, thus leading to food waste. Some, in order not to waste food, force themselves to finish their dishes even though they are already very full, or ask people dining with them to help finish their food. As a dietician, I recommend that such food consumption habits be discouraged and avoided.

Why are there leftovers?

Studies have shown that it takes a lot of energy to get food from the farm to the table. It follows that if we allow food to go to waste, we waste not only the discarded food itself, but the energy embedded in the wasted food. Leftovers and food waste are an especially significant issue during holiday seasons and at feasts and parties. Why are there leftovers? Why is so much food being wasted? It's an issue that merits serious attention.

When I dine out, I am in the habit of discreetly observing the dining habits of patrons at other tables while I wait for my order to arrive. One time, because my table was very close to the next one, I overheard the conversation between the waiter and the diners at their table. The waiter told the diners that if they ordered set meals dur-

ing that time slot, they'd get a free side dish of fried food. Lured by the prospect of free food, the man at the table ordered a set meal each for himself, his wife, and their child.

I thought to myself when I heard the order: “Their child is so small; will he really be able to finish an entire set meal on his own?” My next thought a few seconds later: “If he manages to finish it, the extra fat and calories will end up a burden on his body. If he doesn't and the unfinished food lands in a garbage can, it will be a waste of energy and resources.”

Less than an hour later, I heard the wife say to the husband, “I'm so stuffed, I can't eat another bite.” “It's okay,” the husband replied. “That food was free.” As the two adults gathered their things and got ready to leave, they said to their son, “If you can't finish the food, you don't have to. Eating too much is bad for health.”

I've also witnessed an example of just the opposite: I once saw a friend “dump” one spoonful of food after another from her child's bowl into the young one's mouth, saying at the same time, “Don't waste food. Be grateful you have things to eat. Many children in Africa are starving.” I still remember the wronged look on the child's face.

Order only what you need

Every experience offers things to emulate and things to avoid. Seeing how that couple in the restaurant treated their food brought to my mind a dining experience of my own with my daughter.

That day, my daughter had eaten some snacks given her by a classmate in school before meeting me for lunch in a restaurant. While we were eat-



ing, I noticed that she didn't seem to have much of an appetite.

When she had finished about half of her spaghetti and was struggling to eat the rest, she began mumbling to herself repeatedly, "Love your food. Waste less, save more! Waste less, save more!" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

As my daughter continued to force-feed herself, I told her to take out her lunch box and save her uneaten spaghetti in the container to take home. I said we'd reheat the leftovers for her to eat when she was hungry.

When eating out, whether alone or with company, I make a point of ordering only what can be finished. When I visit a new restaurant and don't know their portion sizes, I consult with the waiters to refrain from ordering too much. I figure that even if I do end up ordering too little, I can always order more later. If my order comes with dipping sauces, I ask about their portions too. If they are more than what I need, I ask the staff to reduce the amount. I don't over-order even if I could benefit from perks offered by the restaurant. Some restaurants offer free food. If it would be too much, I thank them for the offer and politely decline it.

We all know that wasting food is more than just ditching your leftovers. When you throw

A lot of energy and other resources are required to get food from the farm to the table. Cherish food and prevent it from being wasted through conscious consumption.

away food, it is as if you also toss the water, energy, and other resources that went into producing it. You render all of it meaningless. We should really give this matter some thought and do what we can to help address it.

I have a friend who runs a restaurant. I asked his opinion on the food waste issue before I wrote this article. What he said to me has since been engraved in my mind: "I don't understand why some diners order so much food if they don't need that much. It really makes me angry when I see their unfinished food go to waste. They may think they can spend whatever money they want to, but the Earth's resources belong to every one of us. If you could measure how much is wasted in a single day, it would be enough to feed countless people."

Let's all take that first step that leads to positive change in terms of preventing food from being wasted. Understand the difference between what you need and what you want, and make the wise decision. ♣

Learning from Life's Impermanence

Narrated by Pan Ji-li

Interviewed and compiled by Zhang Yu-fan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Serving at a disaster scene and seeing the pain of those who have lost loved ones has a tremendous impact on Tzu Chi volunteers. Exposure to such suffering is difficult, but they stick to their posts. Such experiences remind them of life's impermanence and prompt them to make the best of their limited life spans by creating positive differences in the world.

A fire broke out in a 40-year-old, 12-story building in the wee hours of the morning of October 14, 2021, in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. It was past five when I arrived at the disaster scene. Streets at the scene that should have been shrouded in darkness at that time were illuminated brightly by the conflagration. I didn't think I'd ever forget the scene in front of me: a once famous landmark that had seen better days,

blackened by the fire, permeated with smoke. Many residents awoke during the fire, choking on the smoke. Too late to make their escape by that time, they rushed to their balconies or windows and cried out for help. Some brandished their flashlights in a desperate effort to attract attention.

Many family members gathered outside the building, holding placards hand-printed with



Pan Ji-li (潘機利), an entrepreneur, has for five years been the convenor for the Tzu Chi Kaohsiung Disaster Coordinating Center. Every time a disaster occurs in Kaohsiung, he drops his work and rushes to the scene to assess damage. His friends and relatives often chide him good-naturedly for putting his volunteer work above his business.

HSIAO YIU-HWA



doorplate numbers, anxiously hoping that the rescue workers could save their loved ones from the fire. Firefighters worked non-stop in a relay effort to put out the conflagration. They were racing against time.

Zhang Jian-kun (張建崑), a fellow Tzu Chi volunteer, lives near the fire scene. Immediately after the fire broke out, he and his wife purchased bottled water and rushed to the burning building to distribute it to police officers and firefighters on-site. The blaze had raged for more than two hours by the time I arrived. I figured that the firefighters were very hungry and exhausted after working for so long, laden with oxygen tanks and other heavy equipment. I talked with other volunteers on-site and asked them to rustle up some breakfast and coffee for the firefighters to help them replenish their energy.

By 7:30 a.m., the conflagration had been successfully brought under control, but the firefighting team continued to spray the building with water to bring down the temperature. Despite the heavy smoke that continued to spew from the building, firefighters entered, hoping to find people still alive and get them to safety. Some time after ten, the first deceased was transported by a fire brigade crane to ground level. The people that had perished in the fire were concentrated on the seventh to 11th floors. Their number turned out to

A volunteer offers a bottle of sports drink to a firefighter. A 12-story building in Yancheng District, Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, caught fire on October 14, 2021. More than 200 firefighters were mobilized to put out the fire and rescue lives. They were kept busy from the wee hours of that morning to the afternoon.

PAN JI-LI

be more than expected, so one more fire crane truck was brought in to help retrieve the bodies.

Medical professionals had been waiting on-site for some time with stretchers to help save lives. Everyone was praying for a miracle and hoping that the next person brought down would be alive. Sadly, the cranes continued to deliver more of the dead. Everyone's heart was heavy.

As one body after another was recovered from the building, waiting family members broke down and burst out crying. Our volunteers, clad in raincoats due to the rain, pressed their palms together and chanted the Buddha's name to pray for peace for the departed souls. As the death toll continued to climb, I ached to think how many unfortunate families would be torn asunder by this tragedy.

Suddenly, I saw the body of a middle-aged man wearing a helmet and a backpack being brought down, his legs and arms bearing tattoos partly obscured by his short-sleeved T-shirt and

short pants. Soon thereafter, I heard a man that looked to be in his 80s lash out at the corpse: "My deplorable gangster son! I can admit you were good for nothing, but how could you be such a fool that you didn't even run for your life?" I went up to the elderly man and asked what had happened. It turned out that the man had found more than 40,000 New Taiwan dollars (US\$1,300) in his son's backpack. "What a fool!" exclaimed the father. "Even when it was time to run for his life, he put on his helmet and went to look for his money!" Everyone around and I could hear the heartbreak and sadness of a father who had lost his son behind the words of anger and complaint.

It was past four in the afternoon when the rescue and recovery operation came to an end. Forty-six people died in the conflagration, making it the deadliest fire in Kaohsiung's history. The disaster had killed even more people than the shocking gas explosions that rocked Kaohsiung's Qianzhen and Lingya districts in 2014.

We must be stronger than the families

At two p.m. on October 16, a soul-summoning ritual was held at the disaster site. We Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized again to offer support to the heartbroken family members. Before the ritual started, I mentally prepared my fellow volunteers for the task ahead by reminding them that since many people had been killed, there would surely be many family members present that needed our care and support. I reminded everyone to be strong. However, when the 46 soul-guiding banners, bearing prayers and the names and birth and death dates of the deceased appeared before our eyes, we couldn't help feeling stunned. And when the bereaved called out their family's names in heartrending voices, many volunteers couldn't maintain their composure. Tears welled up uncontrollably in their eyes.

The air was thick with an aura of emotional pain. I took a few deep breaths and strove to keep my composure. I told myself there were many things waiting for me to do and that I had to keep it together. I looked at the family members beside me—their eyes swollen from crying—and gently comforted them. I encouraged them to wish their departed loved ones the best to help them go in peace. When I met those who had lost their parents to the fire, I suggested that they say the following words to their parents to help them rest in peace: "I've grown up. Don't worry about me. I'll take good care of myself."

This was the first time many volunteers had

witnessed such a fatal fire disaster. I was no exception. Even though I have been the convener for the Tzu Chi Kaohsiung Disaster Coordinating Center for five years, I can't erase the images of one dead body after another being moved out of the building and down to the ground.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen often tells us how impermanent life is. This just proves her right. Every person who teaches us life's impermanence with their own example is like a bodhisattva—it is as if they are using their own suffering to remind us to take the transience and unpredictability of life to heart and to make the best of our limited life spans by living fully. They teach us that life and death are separated by only a breath. They teach us to seize every chance to make positive differences in the world. As I looked back on the day of the fire, I was also touched by the giving of our volunteers. Despite the overwhelming nature of the fire and its aftermath, they stuck to their posts and helped in whatever way they could. They are all real-life bodhisattvas in my mind.

This ruthless fire highlighted and raised awareness of the safety of old buildings, but to the survivors the most crucial matter was how to return to their normal lives. Many victims are underprivileged members of society, so we've stayed in touch with the Social Affairs Bureau of the Kaohsiung city government and continued to offer help and support to the affected. We hope that with Tzu Chi's help, the survivors can more quickly emerge from the trauma of the disaster and regain stability in their lives.

The unforgettable taste of the peanuts

Every time a disaster hits, Tzu Chi volunteers can often be seen at the disaster site. Master Cheng Yen's teaching inspires and guides us as we go among the needy to extend warmth and care: "When others are hurt, we feel the pain; when others suffer, we feel the sorrow."

Our foundation signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Kaohsiung city government at the beginning of 2021. Since then, we've worked even more closely with the city. An example is the relief operation for this fire. We provided 50 body bags for the deceased in response to a request from the Fire Bureau. At the request of the Social Affairs Bureau, we also mobilized our volunteers to serve at the funeral home, the soul-summoning ritual, and the collective funeral service.

Another example of cooperation occurred a couple of months before the fire, in August 2021.



Torrential rains brought by a typhoon had wreaked havoc in the mountains of Kaohsiung, tearing apart the only bridge to an area that had been particularly hard hit. Following reports of people missing, a search and rescue effort was launched by the Fire Bureau. After an overnight search, the firefighters mobilized for the mission were worn out and hungry, their supplies running low. The Fire Bureau contacted Tzu Chi and asked if our foundation could provide water and food for the rescue personnel.

When Fang Han-wu (方漢武), a Tzu Chi volunteer who owns several chain bakeries in Kaohsiung, learned about the need, he notified his stores to take their bread off the shelves to be delivered to the rescue team. He also had hot, steaming coffee prepared for the team. At 2:00 p.m., when the food was ready, volunteers Zheng Yang-qing (鄭楊慶), Cai Hui-ling (蔡慧玲), Li Xiuchuan (李琇釗), Wu Zong-hua (吳宗樺) and I set out by car to deliver the goods to the rescue team. In addition to the bread and coffee prepared by volunteer Fang, we also brought them drinking water and canned sweet multi-grain porridge.

We arrived at our destination in Taoyuan District after driving for more than two hours. It was cold up in the mountains, even more so

Volunteers serve at the soul-summoning ritual in the aftermath of the fatal fire.

ZHANG JIAN-KUN

because of the rain. Having been carrying out their search and rescue mission in such conditions, many firefighters were moved when they received our food. One of them said, "What a blessing it is to have bread to eat and hot coffee to drink during a rescue effort."

We set off on our return journey some time after seven p.m., having successfully completed our delivery mission. Our stomachs growled non-stop in hunger as we traveled down the mountain. Only then did it occur to us that we had eaten next to nothing that entire day. Even though we had just delivered a carload of food, we had not remembered to save any food for ourselves.

We searched the entire vehicle to try to find some food to eat. Our efforts yielded only a packet of peanuts, which we split among us. It was nine by the time we arrived back in the urban district of Kaohsiung. I was exhausted and starving, but buoyed by an indescribable, satisfying sense of fulfillment. As for that bag of peanuts, though they were salty in my mouth, they left a sweet taste in my heart. ❀



Recycling Takes a Rare Time-Out

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Rose Ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

I started photographing Tzu Chi recycling volunteers and their work nearly a decade ago. During all that time, I've never seen any sign at a Tzu Chi recycling station announcing they were temporarily turning away all recycling. But that happened in May 2021, as shown by the sign in the far left of the photo on the opposite page.

When the number of COVID-19 cases suddenly increased in Taiwan in May 2021, the government raised its coronavirus alert to level three—its second highest level—to contain the spread of the disease. It remained at that level for more than two months. It wasn't until the epidemic had subsided that the alert was reduced to level two, on July 27.

That outbreak and the resulting restrictions affected every sector of society. Even Tzu Chi recycling stations, which had never closed their doors before, were forced to temporarily cease operation. Recycling work had long been a part of many volunteers' daily life. I wondered how they were coping during this unexpected time-out.

I visited several recycling stations in my hometown of Tainan, southern Taiwan, to take a look. All the team leaders I met told me that their volunteers had expressed a strong desire to get back into the recycling stations. They felt helpless; they were eager to serve, but couldn't under the current situation. The volunteers were less concerned about the risk of contracting COVID-19 than about recyclable materials being thrown away. They worried about the environmental cost that would result if the recyclable materials were not properly reclaimed, and they were firmly convinced that their recycling work couldn't wait. I could feel their love for the environment and was deeply touched by it.





Taking COVID precautions seriously

I had heard that the Renhe Recycling Station did a great job of enforcing COVID precautions, so I went there for a look. Volunteer Liu Yu-wen (劉玉文) told me about the safety measures they had taken during this time. For example, they suspended their recycling collection rounds as soon as the level three alert was expanded from Taipei and New Taipei City to the entire island, on May 19. They also had the entire station sanitized, and closed it for the first time. Despite all that, some volunteers continued to show up to sort recycling. Only then did Liu realize that many volunteers had keys to the station. He had no choice but to change the lock on the front door. He only changed it back when the government eased some of its restriction measures on July 12.

Even though the station was not yet open to the public, some people insisted on taking their recyclable garbage there. Volunteers decided to place a four-wheeled pushcart near the partially open entrance door in which the public could leave their recycling. Volunteers drew attention to the cart and made its purpose known by erecting a recycled cutout figure with explanatory notes next to the cart. The simple strategy killed two birds with one stone: it prevented people from dropping their garbage outside the door and minimized human contact at the same time.

Many volunteers couldn't wait to get back to work after the COVID restrictions were partially lifted on July 12. They phoned Liu asking when they could start reporting to the station. Since there was still a limit on the number of people that could volunteer there at the same time—five at the most—volunteers had to take turns serving there. They were so happy to finally be able to return to their posts that they dutifully followed the safety protocols and waited their turn.





An empty sorting area

I visited the Annan Recycling Station on July 23. I'm very familiar with this station. As a kid I often went there with my mom, who is a volunteer there. I visited the station from time to time as an adult too. There was always a small mountain of recycling, taller than a full-grown adult, in the sorting area within a corrugated metal shed there. It seemed there were always more recyclables than could ever be sorted. However, during my visit on July 23, I saw the shed standing practically empty—the mountain of mixed recyclables was gone. There were more plastic baskets lying around that were used to contain sorted recycling than there was garbage that needed to be sorted. Even the number of volunteers serving there was down to no more than five, due to the cap on the size of indoor gatherings.

I was feeling a little lonely and forlorn, taking in the scene in front of me, when I heard the volunteers say as they went about their work: "A lot of recyclables are produced every day. Where will they go if no one goes to collect them?" I could hear the worry in their voices. It was their fervent wish that the epidemic would soon fade away so that their work could return to normal.





Never at loose ends for something to do

Su Yu-yun (蘇玉雲) is a volunteer at the Dingmei Recycling Station. I photographed her and wrote a piece about her in 2016. I still vividly remember her as she visited nightclubs in the wee hours of the morning, collecting empty liquor bottles. I asked her on a visit to the Dingmei Recycling Station on July 22, 2021, if her work had been impacted when the pubs and nightclubs had been forced to close due to the pandemic. "There are presently no empty liquor bottles to collect," she answered matter-of-factly. I followed her to the area where used liquor bottles were placed at the recycling station and found it a lot emptier than before. I thought that since her workload must have been greatly reduced, she could use this rare time off to take a good rest, but she surprised me by saying, "I still leave my home every morning before two now to start a day's work. I pick up recyclables at some fixed collection points before coming to the station." I was amazed that even at a time like this, she refused to take it easy and still actively sought out work to do.

She was as busy as a bee, taking care of all sorts of work, as I followed her around the station. Due to the limit on the number of volunteers that could serve there during this time, she had to do others' work as well, which explained her activity. I saw her sorting plastic bags one moment, moving bags filled with plastic bottles to where they belonged the next, and sweeping a sorting area the next. "It looks like you're just as busy as ever," I commented. She answered casually, "There's enough work around here to keep me off the street."



Finally the day is here

The COVID-19 surge in Taiwan gradually abated, so the pandemic alert was lowered to level two on July 27. Tzu Chi recycling stations across the island were finally able to resume operation. I visited the Kunshen Recycling Station one August morning to see what the station looked like to be finally back in business. The station had sent out two trucks that morning to bring back recycling from many collection points. Before long, a vacant area at the station was piled with bag after bag of recycling. Volunteers on-site immediately went to work, sorting the garbage by type. I was so happy to see the volunteers in their element giving of themselves. The sight greatly moved me. But the happiest people of all were the volunteers themselves.

Cai Yu-mei (蔡玉梅, opposite page) is 82. Her face was lit up with the joy of finally being back in the station. Thinking back on those two months when she was forced to stay at home, she said, "I was bored, having nothing to do at home. I couldn't wait to come back here. To keep my kids from worrying about me, I even got vaccinated against COVID. I'm as happy as could be that I can be back here where I belong." ❀



A Loving Spirit Shines Strong

By Ye Wen-ying

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Xu Ying-li is grateful to her husband for taking good care of her and her family. Her husband, Lin Kun-yang, admires her for her courage in asking others for charitable donations, even total strangers she meets on public transportation. He gives her his best support as she dedicates herself to her volunteer work for Tzu Chi.



I supported her as we walked towards the hospital, its large sign not far ahead. Despite hurting from her wound, she didn't complain once on our way there.

Ten minutes earlier, at a Tzu Chi recycling point, I had seen her using her thumbnail to slice through the packing tape on a cardboard box to break down the box for recycling. I suggested that she use a utility knife instead to make her job easier. Much to my dismay, it wasn't but two minutes after she switched to a knife that I heard her say in a quiet voice, "Ah, I cut myself."

It was a good thing there was a hospital just around the corner. When the doctor removed the makeshift bandage on her pinkie finger, it began bleeding profusely. The doctor decided that the wound required stitches and told a nurse to prepare an anesthesia shot. "I thought I'd have to just receive some topical medication," she said, looking worried. "I have recycling work to do on Thursday!" Despite the wound and stitches, she was more concerned she wouldn't be able to volunteer two days later.

An inspiring example

The first time I saw her was on a bus in Taipei three years ago. I was sitting near the rear door when I saw her board the vehicle. She hadn't yet gotten her footing when the bus started moving, so I rose from my seat and stepped forward to help steady her. In response, she flashed me a smile. She looked to be about 80 and was quite petite.

I helped her sit down on the seat next to mine, then took a closer look at her. Her hair was pulled into a neat chignon. She was wearing a maroon jacket and sported tiny pearl earrings. Her demeanor and the way she carried herself told me, a writer for the *Tzu Chi Monthly* magazine for many years, that she was a Tzu Chi commissioner.

My instinct was right: she was indeed a Tzu Chi commissioner, one who had received training and established a roster of people who make monthly donations to the foundation. She had just visited a Tzu Chi donating member to collect his donation and was on her way to another one's home for the same purpose. "Actually, it's more than just collecting donations," she said. "When I visit our donating members, I also extend care to them on behalf of Master Cheng Yen." That's why she makes a point of chatting with her donating members when she visits them. She was collecting donations from only two people that day.

Before I got off the bus, I learned her name: Xu Ying-li (許瑛麗). That name rang a bell—she had been mentioned in a book published by Tzu Chi not long before. The book told the life story of Wen Song-zhen (溫送珍), an entrepreneur and philanthropist, and how the Tzu Chi Keelung Jing Si Hall, in northern Taiwan, had been established. Wen, who passed away in 2021 at the age of 97, donated more than 4.3 hectares (11 acres) of land to Tzu Chi, on which now stands the Keelung Jing Si Hall. Xu Ying-li was one of the reasons that contributed to Wen's decision to donate that large piece of land.

Wen was Xu's neighbor before Xu moved from Taipei to New Taipei City. After Xu retired at 60 from her civil servant position, she took a job working as a janitor at the residential building where she lived. She did cleaning work, disposed of her fellow residents' garbage, and handled mail for them. Wen was puzzled. He knew that having retired from a government job, Xu could have led a cozy retired life on her pension. Why did she choose to become a janitor when she could well afford to take it easy and enjoy her life in her old age?

It turned out that Xu had taken on the janitor job to save up money to donate to Tzu Chi. She had originally planned to donate a million New Taiwan dollars (US\$33,000) to the foundation with some of her pension when she retired, but that plan was derailed when one of her children purchased a villa for her and her husband, Lin Kunyang (林坤養), so that the couple could live in a more comfortable place in their old age. Xu knew that paying off the mortgage would be a heavy burden for her daughter, so she decided to pay off the mortgage with her own pension. With that, she no longer had a million to donate to Tzu Chi, but she didn't forget her plan.

One day, one of the janitors who worked for her building took a sick leave. The building's management committee asked Xu if she could fill in for him for three days and she agreed. When she was cleaning the premises as the stand-in janitor, she looked up at the sky and made a wish: "If I could find a job, I'd donate a million to Tzu Chi."

Her temporary job became a formal one three days later. "Master Cheng Yen is right: where there is a will, there is a way," Xu said of her "good luck."

In fact, Xu had already made a lump sum donation of a million Taiwanese dollars to Tzu Chi in her husband and children's name before her retirement using her savings over the years.

After she started working as a janitor, she hoped to save up enough money in three years to donate another million.

When Wen learned about this, he was greatly moved—so moved that he and his wife began volunteering for Tzu Chi too. He later donated a plot of land to the foundation and helped bring about the construction of the Keelung Jing Si Hall.

Xu's story goes to show how examples of kindness and good deeds inspire and beget more of the same.

A good husband

Xu had already moved to her new villa home and was no longer working as a janitor on the day she accidentally cut herself. She had fulfilled her wish of donating another million to Tzu Chi. Though she had moved away, she had kept up the habit of volunteering every Tuesday at the Tzu Chi recycling point near where she used to live.

We returned to the recycling point after her injury was sutured at the hospital. While waiting for her husband to come pick her up, Xu began sorting through recyclable garbage at the recycling point again. She was disregarding the doctor's advice to keep her wound clean, but seemed unable to sit around idly for even just a minute. I immediately "blew the whistle" on her and asked her to just sit and rest.

Xu's husband, 87, arrived not long after. He's not a Tzu Chi volunteer, but fully supports his wife's volunteering. When he learned on the phone that his wife had been injured, he drove over to take her home.

Lin worked at an air-conditioning company before he retired at 71. He mentioned that more than 30 years ago, when Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital first opened, they had purchased some products from his company, so his company sent him to the hospital to take care of some business. Later, he learned from his supervisor that the hospital had been operating in the red since it opened. "Many [underprivileged] patients couldn't afford their treatment," Lin explained. "The hospital thus ended up with a lot of unpaid bills. It was the Tzu Chi Foundation that had been making up the shortfall." Lin expressed his admiration for Master Cheng Yen for having the courage to establish a hospital, especially back when Tzu Chi was a much smaller organization and did not have many resources. Establishing a hospital is, after all, a massive undertaking. "It was no wonder that some people were opposed to her decision to do that at the time," he added.

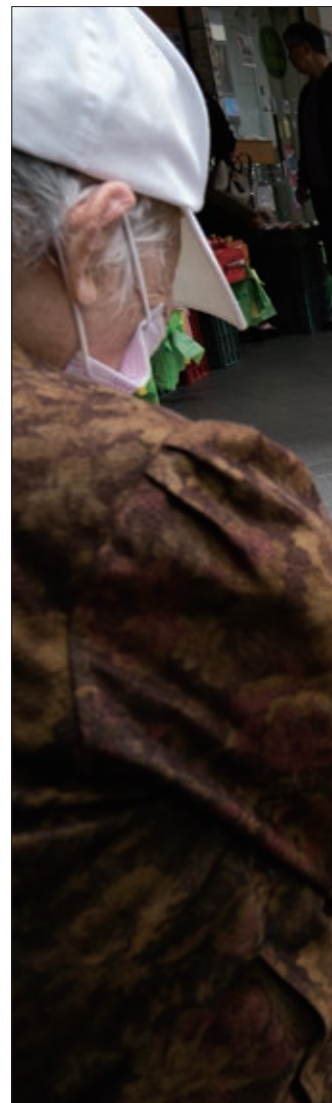
Xu has been so devoted to the philanthropic work of Tzu Chi because she wants to help ease the Master's burden. To support Tzu Chi's missions, she lives as frugally as she can to save money to donate. For example, she always brings her own water when she goes out so that she need not spend money on beverages. She cuts her own hair to avoid going to a beauty parlor. She hasn't bought any new clothes in years, saying that the clothes she bought when she was still working are enough to keep her clothed until she is 90.

Xu is most thankful to her husband for supporting her in her devotion to Tzu Chi in every possible way. "What makes me happiest is that he drives me to volunteer every day." She is also grateful to him for never voicing any objections whenever she decides to donate money to Tzu Chi to help with its charity work. He even helps her put her donating members' accounts in order. And he cooks his own meals when she goes out to volunteer so that she can volunteer without worries. When it's time to watch the Master's televised talks and she forgets about it, he reminds her of it too, saying, "Here comes the Master!"

"My grandmother told me before she passed away that she was sure I'd marry a good husband, and she was right," said Xu, her face beaming. "I'm really lucky."

A good husband

Xu was born when Taiwan was under Japan's colonial rule (1895-1945), in 1938. Her father was conscripted into the Japanese army during World War II and sent off to Southeast Asia to fight for Japan and never returned. Xu, the third oldest child in a family of four girls, was only six at the time. Her younger sister was not yet two. Their





↑ Xu Ying-li has been engaged in Tzu Chi's recycling work for two decades. She is 84 but still sorts recycling two days a week.

← Xu (right) poses with her fellow volunteers at a Tzu Chi recycling point in Zhongzheng District, Taipei, northern Taiwan. She thinks that giving without expecting anything in return brings one the most joy.



mother supported the family by working in a factory. She was helped by her mother-in-law, who lived with them and made a meager income from sorting tea leaves.

Xu often went to a market as a child to scavenge leftover vegetables and coal for her grandmother to use in cooking. “My grandma was overjoyed we didn’t have to spend any money on vegetables all year round,” Xu recalled. She started working after she graduated from elementary school and paid her own way through junior high school. She later was hired at the Taiwan Fisheries Bureau in the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, where she worked until she retired at 60.

When Xu was 17, her grandma, who suffered from malnutrition, had a fall. This was followed by a stroke that left her bedridden for three years. During that time, Xu would get out of bed early every morning to prepare rice porridge for her grandma. She only went to work after feeding her and changing her diaper. At noon, she returned home with lunch for her grandma, fed her, and changed her diaper before going back to work. She hurried back home again after work to tend to her grandma’s needs and wash a pile of diapers. At night, she slept with her grandma. Xu tied her hand to that of her grandma’s, so if her grandma

Serving at a Jing Si Books and Café is part of Xu’s volunteer work for Tzu Chi.

so much as stirred a finger, she could immediately rise and take care of her needs. She took care of her grandma like that for four years, until she passed away.

After her two older sisters got married and moved out of home, Xu decided that when she got married herself she’d have her mother move in with her and her husband. When she met her future husband, he agreed to live with her family after they were married. Xu’s grandmother had said while she was still alive that she was sure Xu would marry a good husband, and his willingness to accept Xu’s family bore out that prediction. “My mom and younger sister moved in with us three days after we tied the knot,” Xu said. Her mom later helped her run the household and even baby-sat her five children. Xu’s younger sister later moved out when she got married.

“My mom passed at 75, when I was 50,” Xu said. “My husband had helped me take care of her for 22 years. He really is a wonderful man.” Xu’s smile couldn’t be broader as she continued: “He has a great sense of responsibility, and he was

good at what he did at work, which required a great deal of technical expertise. He respects me and I admire him. My oldest sister has nothing but good things to say about him.”

“He even does my hair every day,” she added, which brought to my mind the scene in the movie *Out of Africa* in which Robert Redford washes Meryl Streep’s hair for her. Her husband seemed equally romantic—even though Lin, drinking tea off to the side when his wife made the comment, didn’t look like a particularly romantic man.

The reason Lin did his wife’s hair for her was actually not grounded in romance. Xu explained that after she broke her arm about four years previously, she could no longer raise her right arm high enough to properly comb her hair and put it up in a bun. That’s why she needs her husband’s help. “Without his help, I could not look presentable enough to go out. Thankfully, he always helps me out.” Though his actions might not be particularly romantic, they reveal Lin to be a very loving husband.

Still going strong

Xu is advanced in years and no longer maintains as large a roster of donating members as she did before. Though she has passed on some of her members to younger commissioners, she still regularly collects donations from more than a hundred donating members. She used to make such collections every month but has reduced it to twice a year now. The donating members who live farthest from her are her husband’s relatives in his hometown, Yilan, on Taiwan’s northeast coast. She collects their donations every year on Tomb-Sweeping Day, when they gather together to clean the graves of their deceased family members. Her other donating members live across the Greater Taipei Area. She either takes a bus or her husband drives her to collect their donations.

Xu has a natural way of exuding care for others that made many of her neighbors and former colleagues happy to become her donating members. She joined Tzu Chi in 1990, and to this day, at the age of 84, she still actively recruits donating members for the foundation. She meets fewer people from whom she can raise money for Tzu Chi because she is no longer working, but she makes good use of her time on public transportation to do that. Her husband admires her for her ease and courage in asking others, even total strangers, to donate to Tzu Chi. “I could never do that!” he said.

In addition to raising and collecting donations

for Tzu Chi, Xu serves as a recycling volunteer two days a week and volunteers at a Jing Si Books and Café once a week. She also helps out in Tzu Chi classes for older people and works the phones at a Tzu Chi office, answering questions from callers. She attends funerals on behalf of the foundation too. She is as dedicated a volunteer as can be.

After we met on the bus, her image was imprinted on my mind. I felt drawn to her. Later, I asked her if I could go see her when she was serving as a recycling volunteer. That was when my not-so-wise suggestion led her to cut her pinkie finger—a cut that required six stitches to repair.

It surprised me that even though she was injured, she went out to volunteer the next day at the Jing Si Books and Café where she regularly volunteers. She had been worried as she was having her cut sewn up that she wouldn’t be able to volunteer two days later at the recycling station near her new home, but when the time came, she showed up at the station as usual. Her injury prevented her from doing some of the work at the station, but she did what she could do. She uncapped PET bottles for another volunteer to cut and remove the rings from the necks, then sorted the bottles by color. She worked at the station from nine in the morning to nearly four in the afternoon. After she retired, she never took an afternoon nap, all because she wanted to have more time to volunteer. That spirit of diligence alone is enough to win her a lot of admiration.

“The more I volunteer, the happier I am!” Xu declared. Though she’s been through some rough patches, she never thinks life has ever treated her badly when she looks back on her life’s journey. She constantly harbors a heart of gratitude. Having lived through an indigent childhood and adolescent years and a busy middle age, she finds her old age the most rewarding period of her life—she’s found that giving without expecting anything in return always brings one the most joy.

“Don’t stop, because once you do you stop for good,” says Master Cheng Yen to older volunteers. She reminds older people not to overexert themselves and to watch out for their safety when they volunteer, but not to acknowledge defeat to old age and to continue giving of themselves. Xu is a most faithful disciple of the Master’s; she does everything she teaches. Her spirit of giving and service makes her a poster child for the values espoused by Tzu Chi. And that’s not all: her loving heart shines outward too. No wonder just a look at her on the bus told me she was a Tzu Chi commissioner and made it hard for me to forget her. ❁

What the Heart Sees

Text and photos by Khusnul Khotimah

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

With Tzu Chi's help, Sofyan Sukmana traveled from Indonesia to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in Taiwan five times over 11 years to have a tumor treated. The visits began when he was 15. He is now a 34-year-old married man running a computer learning center for the visually impaired. Help from Tzu Chi turned his life around, so he is now paying it forward, using his computer skills to light the paths of others.



“**T**his is a screen reading program for the visually impaired. If you want to learn how to install the 2021 portable version, please stay tuned at the end of this video,” said Sofyan Sukmana in a cheerful voice. He was working on a video to upload to his online channel.

Sofyan is almost completely blind himself. It’s hard to imagine how he could create all of his videos on his own. He chooses the topics, records the videos, adds subtitles, and uploads the videos all by himself. He launched his channel, Dunia Netra, in January 2021. It now boasts nearly 2,300 subscribers.

Teaching the blind computer skills

Sofyan was diagnosed with a facial tumor when he was a child. His condition was later determined to be fibrous dysplasia, a benign bone condition in which abnormal fibrous tissue develops in lieu of normal bone. Even two surgeries failed to arrest the growth of the tumor. Eventually, it reached 15 centimeters, drastically deforming and distorting the right side of the boy’s face and eye. The vision in both of his eyes was also marred by the enormous growth. When he was 15, Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia saw him for the first time in a free clinic event. They decided to arrange for him to receive treatment at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in Taiwan. Sofyan made his first trip there in 2005, followed by four more visits over the next ten years.

Sofyan lost the sight in his right eye due to the tumor, but that in his left eye was saved when the tumor was removed in 2005. Unfortunately, the tumor grew back a couple of years later. Though it was successfully removed again, the vision remaining in his left eye was seriously impacted. He is now almost completely blind.

His blindness notwithstanding, Sofyan is known for his studiousness and drive. He never ceased to explore his potential, and he worked hard to learn marketable skills, hoping one day to become economically independent. His hard work paid off. He is 34 and has worked in a bank and at a marine transportation company, and he ran a small business.

To learn computer skills, he attended computer courses offered by Mitra Netra, a non-profit foundation for the visually impaired. He was still

living in North Jakarta at the time, and he’d have to take several buses to South Jakarta for classes. He reflected on his computer training: “Knowing how to use a computer improves the chances of success in your education or career. What I learned at Mitra Netra is important for the unsighted. It’s what inspired me to offer similar classes for the visually impaired.”

Sofyan graduated from Indraprasta PGRI University in 2018 with a degree in psychology and counseling. Afterwards, he opened a computer learning center in a housing village built by Tzu Chi in Cengkareng, West Jakarta, teaching the blind how to use word-processing and other software. His wife, Februari Anawati, taught in the classes too. He named his center “Light of Hope.”

Many visually impaired people need training to use computers, and he had students as young as kindergarteners. Those students who had the means to pay were charged only 30,000 rupiah (US\$2.1) for two hours of courses, but students from destitute families could attend the classes free of charge. Sofyan said that this way he could help visually impaired people and support his family at the same time.

When the coronavirus epidemic broke out in 2020, Sofyan saw the number of his students plummet from 50 to five. “My enrollment took a nosedive,” Sofyan said with a smile. “I suddenly found myself with a lot of time on my hands, so I began thinking about what I could do with my extra time.”

He decided to try teaching via the Internet. Through an assistance program organized by Indonesia’s Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Sofyan was able to connect digitally with and teach visually impaired students in eastern Indonesia, Sumatra, and Bali. Later, he learned that his students already knew of him, because they had all subscribed to his YouTube channel. Ten people now regularly attend his online classes. Faizin, one of the students, lives in Pekalongan, Central Java. He is learning how to create electronic charts and tables. “Teacher Sofyan explains things in a way that’s easy to understand,” he said. “His classes are laid-back and fun. Sometimes we even chat and joke around a little.”

A stepping stone, not a stumbling block

Sofyan has experienced a lot of hardship in his life because of his illness, yet he has turned out to be such a fine, positive person that his story inspires courage in people struggling with similar

Sofyan prepares to upload a new video to his YouTube channel. He started it in January 2021 and now has more than 2,000 subscribers.



challenges in their lives. When Sofyan was a child, his parents spent almost all their money on his medical bills so that his condition could be treated, but to no avail. Even though his treatment in Taiwan was much more successful, he eventually lost nearly all his eyesight. Every time his tumor grew back, he had to go under the knife again. It was a long, excruciating journey, but Sofyan refused to be knocked down. He said that even though he couldn't see, his heart could feel the love from people around him. Sustained by such care and kindness, he never gave up pursuing his dream—that one day he could use his expertise to help others.

"I have a motto: don't look upon your disability as a stumbling block, but as a stepping stone to a better future," he says. He hopes that his motto can inspire other disabled people to lift themselves up and live happier lives. He believes that it's of the utmost importance to accept yourself as you are. Only with a healthy mindset can you find the peace to live well.

Tzu Chi volunteer Leo Kusno (梁國瑞) often visits Sofyan to check on his well-being. He admires Sofyan for his ability to think positively and for continuing his learning. "Sofyan is really something," said Kusno. "If more young people

Sofyan runs a computer learning center for the visually impaired. His wife teaches in the center too.

in Indonesia were as determined as he is in improving themselves, Indonesia would no doubt become a more prosperous and advanced country."

Sofyan said that he would never forget how kindly Tzu Chi volunteers and Dharma Master Cheng Yen have treated him and his family. Beginning at age 15, he traveled five times in 11 years to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in Taiwan to undergo his surgeries. Volunteers were with him every step of the way and treated him like family—and they are still there for him today. He said, "My dad told me before he passed away that I must have faith in myself because I have many people's support. He encouraged me to prove with my own actions that I have the ability to stand on my own." He didn't disappoint his father.

Sofyan recalled what Master Cheng Yen said to him when he met her in Taiwan in 2008. "The Master said to me at the time, 'Though the world you see is dark, be sure to keep your heart full of light.' I'll always bear those words in mind." ❀

The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

Wise and virtuous disciples of Buddhism must renounce all evil ways and abide by the proper rules for daily life. My fellow monks! This is "Right Livelihood."



"Right Livelihood" is a way of life and the foundation for everything we do. All our thoughts and actions must be proper.

Cultivating Buddhism means we must follow "Right Livelihood." Our attitude towards daily life must be correct. In everything we do, we must not stray off course.



When Master Cheng Yen is no longer here, how will the missions of Tzu Chi carry on?

Master Cheng Yen replied: Before Sakyamuni passed away from this world, he did not assign a successor. However, his spirit has lived on in the minds of generations of Buddhist disciples. All those who care about Tzu Chi must not worry about the future of the foundation. We should focus our attention on the present moment, here and now—we must be determined to purify ourselves and bring peace to all.

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



The United States

Over 30 tornadoes ripped through six mid-western and southern U.S. states—Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, and Tennessee—on December 10 and 11, 2021. The storms left a trail of death and destruction in their wake. Tzu Chi USA responded by launching a series of aid distributions for victims in Missouri and Kentucky. Besides a cash card worth a thousand U.S. dollars for each recipient family, volunteers also prepared care packages containing blankets, scarves, face masks, and other items for distribution.

In order for the distributions to take place before Christmas, the American Red Cross, which has worked with Tzu Chi USA for 13 years on disaster relief missions, compiled the recipient rosters at record speed. Two of the distributions were held in Mayfield, Kentucky, on December 22 and 23. When Kathy O’Nan, the mayor of Mayfield, learned of Tzu Chi’s plans to help, she said: “Everybody’s been so generous, but this one just really hit me specially. . . . I am humbled;

A tornado survivor who came to a Tzu Chi distribution held in Mayfield, Kentucky, on December 23, 2021, cries as she relates her helplessness when the tornadoes hit. Tzu Chi USA launched a series of distributions in the aftermath of the tornado disaster that wreaked havoc in the southern and midwestern United States on December 10 and 11, 2021. YUE MA

humbled to realize what you’re bringing to our community.”

Richard Foley, a resident of Mayfield, came to the December 22 distribution. His home had sustained serious damage during the tornadoes and he lost his car as well. Despite that, he emphasized his gratitude to have survived the disaster, especially as so many lives had been lost. He recalled that scary day to Tzu Chi volunteers: “I looked up and the roof went and I could see the tornadoes.” Speaking of Tzu Chi’s aid, he said, choked with emotion, “It was a surprise and it gave me hope. . . . I needed help, and I really appreciated receiving it.”

Steven Nelson, of the American Red Cross, commented that Tzu Chi was giving survivors a very gracious and necessary gift. He said that he could see the impact of the foundation's help. "When many of them [survivors] are leaving the [distribution] centers, you can tell by the look in their faces that there were tears in their eyes. Your gift is very much appreciated."

Volunteers heard many heartrending stories during their distributions. A mother held her son tightly in her arms as the tornadoes hit, but their roof collapsed, killing her son on the spot; the mother herself was injured in her face and body. A household with 12 members lost their home and six family members to the tornadoes. Among the six family members who had survived was a 24-year-old daughter who had become paralyzed and would have to spend the rest of her life confined to bed.

By December 24, 2021, Tzu Chi had helped 455 tornado-impacted families. While the tragedies that had occurred as a result of the disaster were deeply saddening, volunteers hoped that their sincere care and the foundation's help could help lessen the suffering.

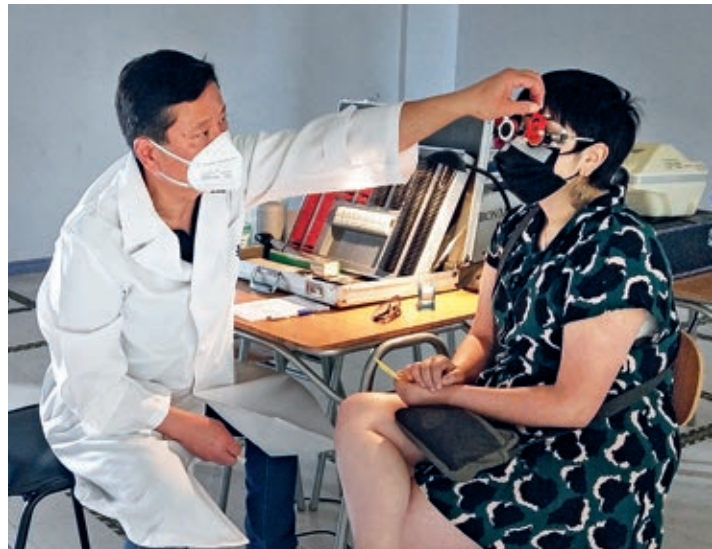
Chile

Tzu Chi volunteers in Chile held an aid distribution for underserved families on November 7, 2021, at Liceo Carmela Carvajal de Prat, a girls' high school in Providencia. A free eye clinic was conducted at the same time for students at the school.



Tzu Chi volunteers in Chile held a food distribution at a high school in Providencia on November 7, 2021, to help 200 needy families weather the pandemic.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI CHILE



Dr. Xu Zhe-zhang fits a student at Liceo Carmela Carvajal de Prat, in Providencia, Chile, for glasses.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI CHILE

On the morning of November 7, forty-three volunteers worked together to unload and organize the food items to be distributed that day at the school. Among the volunteers were 12 students from the high school. Tzu Chi had held a distribution at the school in August 2021 for 200 needy households, and these students had helped that time too. They were all happy that they could take part in such meaningful activities.

Some students at the school noticed that their myopia had worsened because of remote learning during the pandemic, prompting school administrators to ask Tzu Chi to conduct a free eye clinic at the school for underprivileged students. Prescription glasses were offered at the event, in addition to eye examinations. The clinic was staffed by members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA). TIMA doctor Xu Zhe-zhang (許哲彰) saw 45 students that day.

Isabel, a parent of one of the students, said of the free clinic: "This is a terrific activity. I don't have a job now and cannot bring in any money for my family. I'm greatly thankful that my daughter could get a suitable pair of glasses here."

Two hundred families received food items that day. Like many other countries around the world, Chile has suffered from the impact of COVID-19. With no end to the pandemic in sight, volunteers hoped to help ease the financial burden of needy families.



Tzu Chi Indonesia repaired a road for the village of Simpak in Parung Panjang, Bogor, Indonesia, to make it safer to use. The repairs took 20 days and were completed on November 15, 2021.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI INDONESIA

Indonesia

A road that Tzu Chi Indonesia repaired for the village of Simpak in Parung Panjang, Bogor, West Java, was inaugurated on December 5, 2021.

According to Wihih Kristanto, a resident of Simpak, people in the village used to have to take a mountain road to get to the township of Jagabaya. That road was difficult and dangerous

An inauguration ceremony was held on December 5, 2021, to celebrate the completion of the new road in Simpak, Bogor, Indonesia.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI INDONESIA



to navigate at night. For everyone's safety, Kristanto invited his fellow villagers in 2007 to chip in to build a new, different road to Jagabaya. Many villagers made a living by selling pastry in Jakarta, and the new road would make their trips there safer, so many contributed to the construction. With everyone's help, the road was completed in 2008.

Unfortunately, not enough money had been raised to build a high-quality road, and it wasn't long before damage began to emerge. Motor scooters often slipped on its surface when it rained, and cars easily got stuck in muddy pot-holes. Villagers tried to fix what they could on their own, but their makeshift repairs didn't improve the situation much. When Tzu Chi volunteers learned of the road's poor condition, they decided to help by repairing the road to make it safer to travel.

The project began on October 25, 2021. To make the new road more durable, the repairs were made with concrete reinforced with steel wire mesh. Two to four volunteers went to the village every day during the road's construction to monitor the work and keep an eye on its progress. Some villagers helped monitor the work too and prepared drinks and snacks for the construction workers. Workers worked late each night to finish the repairs sooner. Villagers would also stay willingly into the night to keep an eye on the work. Wihih Kristanto said of their participation: "We don't mind staying up late to help out. Even being tired is worth it. Tzu Chi volunteers are helping to improve our lives by fixing the road. We must do what we can to help."

The repairs to the road, 700 meters (2,297 feet) long and two and a half meters (8.2 feet) wide, were finished on November 15, 2021. An inauguration ceremony was held on December 5 to mark the happy occasion.

Polung is a pastry vendor who has to drive early every morning to Jakarta for his business. He said thankfully of Tzu Chi's help: "I'm really grateful to Tzu Chi for repairing the road for us. This means a lot for vendors like me who often have to take the road when it is dark. The new road is smooth and even—a lot more comfortable and safer to travel on now."

Volunteers also distributed 131 bags of rice, each weighing ten kilograms (22 pounds), to villagers on the inauguration day. The distribution enhanced the joyous atmosphere of the occasion. The villagers' smiles were the greatest reward volunteers could hope for on the happy day.



Serbia

Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe distributed winter clothes to residents of four refugee camps in Serbia, from November 25 to 27, 2021. The four camps were in Obrenovac, Sid, Adaševci, and Krnjaca.

To save transportation costs, the clothes given out were ordered and produced in Serbia. Even so, the cost of the clothing had increased because the pandemic had made it harder to obtain the materials necessary to produce the clothing. The manufacturer had originally intended to pass the higher price

on to Tzu Chi, but after they learned that the foundation was ordering the clothes for refugees, they lowered the prices. The volunteers had 1,000 winter jackets prepared for the distribution this time. The sizes included those for children as well as adults.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe visited four refugee camps in Serbia from November 25 to 27, 2021, distributing winter jackets to residents there. They also gave out cards printed with the contact information of Tzu Chi offices in Europe so that refugees could seek the foundation's help when they needed it. Residents at a refugee camp in Obrenovac are pictured here holding clothes and cards distributed by the volunteers.

DEJAN AKSENTIJEVIC



On the morning of November 23, six volunteers from Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands traveled for nine hours across five countries before they arrived in Belgrade, Serbia, at 6:40 in the evening. They were joined by 17 more volunteers from Britain, Serbia, and Bosnia.

One of the distributions was held on November 25 at the camp in Obrenovac. Samiullah Bahadari,

Tzu Chi volunteers play a game with children at a refugee camp in Sid, Serbia.

LIN YONG-XIN

22, was from Afghanistan. He had arrived at the camp just three days earlier. His father had worked for the United States. Fearing for his own life after Taliban insurgents took control of Afghanistan, he decided to leave his home country. It took him three months to trek to Serbia. Tzu Chi volunteers felt for the plight of refugees like him. They hoped that the clothes they brought could warm not just their bodies but also their hearts.

Quite a few refugees had broken their legs during their journeys to seek a better future for themselves. Volunteers were heartened when they saw that refugees lining up to receive their clothes let those who had broken their legs go first.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, the number of refugees in the camps that volunteers visited hadn't decreased. The pandemic had affected everyone's life, and the refugees must have felt its impact, too. Volunteers prayed that the pandemic would pass soon. They also prayed for world peace so that there would be fewer suffering people in the world.

Tzu Chi volunteers started distributing clothes to refugees in Serbia in 2016. Though their work was interrupted for a time by the pandemic, this was the second time in 2021 they visited Serbia to help refugees. Their first trip was made in the summer for the distribution of summer clothes. Volunteers also gave out cards printed with the contact information of Tzu Chi offices in Europe during the latest distributions so that refugees could seek the foundation's help where and when they needed it.

New Zealand

Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, went into lockdown in mid-August 2021 as it began fighting an outbreak of the Delta variant. The lockdown wasn't lifted until early December 2021, after more than 100 days of severe restrictions. To help ease the impact of the lockdown on the vulnerable, local Tzu Chi volunteers responded by distributing food aid to those in need. Volunteers gave out 255 packages of food and other daily necessities over three days in late October and November alone.

Nearly 20 items of food and other necessities were prepared for each family who came to the distributions. Participants registered online to receive aid. They were also required to provide their license plate numbers for volunteers to identify them on the day they received their aid package. The events were conducted in a drive-through fashion to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

One hundred and twenty-five families had signed up online for the October 30 distribution, but



Volunteers in Auckland, New Zealand, unload food to be distributed to families affected by the pandemic.

LI JIAN-ZHONG

only 83 showed up, 42 fewer families than expected. In a meeting afterwards, volunteers decided to email those households that didn't show up to find out why. Some families responded that they had forgotten about the distribution or gotten the dates wrong; others said they had fallen ill or had had to take care of an emergency. Volunteers brainstormed how to increase attendance and decided they'd email families three days before the following distributions to remind them to come, followed by a text message reminder one day before the events. If they still didn't show up on the designated day, volunteers phoned them on their cell phones. The volunteers' efforts paid off: the attendance rates for the following distributions increased considerably.

One recipient told volunteers at the November 27 distribution that the latest outbreak had made her life very difficult. That day was the third time she had received food aid from Tzu Chi. She said she didn't know what she would have done without Tzu Chi's help. When she learned from volunteers that the foundation was mostly funded by small donations from its donating members, she said, visibly moved, "Thank you for pooling together people's small donations to help those experiencing a rough patch in their lives." ❀

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

TAIWAN

Hualien: Headquarters
Tel: 886-3-8266779
Fax: 886-3-8267776

Taipei: Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center
Tel: 886-2-28989000
Fax: 886-2-28989994

ARGENTINA

Tel: 54-11-48625770
Fax: 54-11-43140252

AUSTRALIA

Brisbane
Tel: 61-7-32727938
Fax: 61-7-32727283

Gold Coast
Tel: 61-7-55717706
Fax: 61-7-55717703

Melbourne
Tel: 61-3-98971668
Fax: 61-3-98974288

Perth
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

Sydney
Tel: 61-2-98747666
Fax: 61-2-98747611

BRAZIL

Tel: 55-11-55394091
Fax: 55-11-55391683

BRUNEI

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CANADA

Edmonton
Tel: 1-780-4639788
Fax: 1-780-4621799

Montreal
Tel: 1-514-8442074
Fax: 1-514-2889152

Toronto
Tel: 1-416-8868886
1-905-9471182
Fax: 1-416-9002048

Vancouver
Tel: 1-604-2667699
Fax: 1-604-2667659

DOMINICAN REP.

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EL SALVADOR

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The true value of our life is judged by how well we use it, not by the opinions of others.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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