

慈濟

# Tzu Chi

## Buddhism in Action

**Opening Opportunities  
in Nepal Through  
Vocational Training**





**By cherishing every moment and serving with a generous spirit,  
we create a truly blessed life and help bring about a better world.**

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

# A Peaceful World, Our Greatest Blessing

Translated by Teresa Chang

Our final year-end blessing ceremony was held on February 8, followed soon thereafter by the Lunar New Year. This time of year always produces a sense of joy and festivity, yet I cannot help but feel how quickly time passes—another year has slipped by nearly unnoticed. As life grows shorter with each passing day, cherishing our time and living with meaning and purpose is all the more important. It is a blessing to live each day in peace, and an even greater blessing to have the karmic affinity to cultivate a generous heart and work for the welfare of all.

The Buddha came to this world for one great purpose: to teach the Bodhisattva Path, guiding everyone to awaken their bodhisattva heart and give to those who suffer. Everyone possesses an innate buddha nature, but layers of ignorance and delusion have accumulated within us, lifetime after lifetime, obscuring our pure intrinsic nature. To rediscover this buddha nature is the goal of our spiritual cultivation.

In our cultivation, it is essential to guard our hearts and minds. If we fail to rectify even a single thought of ignorance, we begin to deviate from the right path; a deviation of a mere hair's breadth can lead us ten thousand miles astray in the end. If others' words or attitudes hurt us, clouding the mirror of our mind, we must use the Buddha's teachings to wipe it clean. In doing so, we transform our afflictions into wisdom, allowing us to respond to others with kindness and form positive affinities.

As I traveled around Taiwan for our year-end blessing ceremonies, volunteers arrived early each morning to meet with me. The life stories they shared were like living sutras, enriching my knowledge and wisdom. I also listened as they spoke of their experiences in serving others. Sometimes, differing opinions led to friction in their work; when they shared these challenges, I helped them resolve their differences and realign

their course. Think of it like a train: As long as the two rails of a track are properly laid, the train moves forward steadily, no matter how many carriages are attached. Likewise, when our direction is correct and our hearts are in accord, we can walk steadily together on the Bodhisattva Path.

Each day, I am filled with gratitude that we have come together in Tzu Chi, giving of ourselves with joyful hearts among like-minded people. Seeing everyone fulfill their roles with unity and mutual love fills me with profound contentment. It is deeply comforting when I hear volunteers share how they have cared for families in need for many years—sometimes from the time children were young until they grew up and became independent. I feel the same comfort when I see multi-generational families volunteering together, witnessing the harmony and warmth within their households as they walk this path of service. These are the greatest gifts I could ever receive.

However, our service must always be grounded in empathy. The families cared for by Tzu Chi often include older people with no one to depend on or those suffering from illness. They truly need a helping hand. When our volunteers clean their homes or provide assistive devices to ease their daily lives, we can imagine the gratitude they feel. Yet, while it is a blessing to be loved and cared for, no one truly wishes to be in a position of need. Those who give therefore must act with great sensitivity, ensuring they do not wound a recipient's dignity. When we approach others with sincerity, offering service from the heart, they will surely feel the warmth of our love.

Good work requires many hands. The more kindhearted people there are, the greater the peace and harmony in society. A society filled with good people and good deeds is truly blessed. The greatest blessing of all comes when hearts unite in love and action, creating a world free from disaster and filled with peace. ❀

# Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

April 2026



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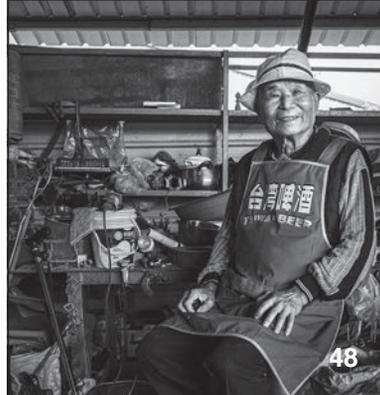
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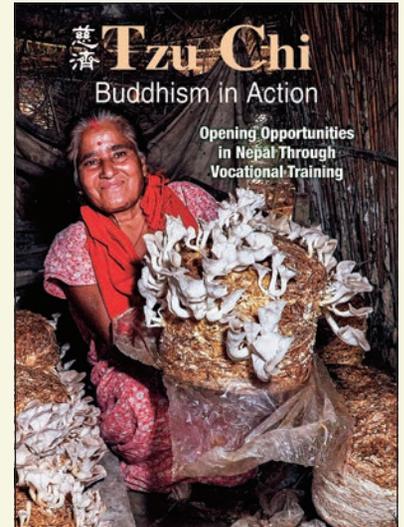
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For nearly 30 years, a gentle Malaysian grandmother turned recycling, fundraising, and home visits into a lifelong offering of love with Tzu Chi.

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Once driven by money and chance, Xu Wu-song now finds lasting fulfillment in routine, reflection, reading, and steady service to the Earth.

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# Tzu Chi Event Highlights

Dec. 17, 2025 to Feb. 10, 2026

## China

- From December 2025 to January 2026, winter aid distributions were carried out across 26 provinces and municipalities. Volunteers from local or neighboring provinces organized a combination of centralized distribution events and home visits, providing winter clothing, food, and other essential supplies to 18,000 vulnerable households.

## Cambodia

- Working with the Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association and the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, volunteers held a year-end blessing ceremony and distribution on January 25 for families living near the Dangkor landfill in Phnom Penh. During the event, 707 households received aid items, including rice, noodles, cooking oil, and blankets.

## Vietnam

- Tzu Chi held four winter aid distributions in Ha Tinh Province on January 31 and February 1, in collaboration with the Foreign Affairs Department of the province and the Red Cross. Rice, blankets, and cash assistance (500,000 Vietnamese dong [US\$20] per family) were distributed to 800 households. Tzu Chi's work in the region began at the end of 2020, when the foundation provided flood relief in Ha Tinh and Quang Binh provinces in partnership with a Taiwanese business association. Over the following five years, Tzu Chi continued partnering with the association to carry out poverty relief and educational support efforts.



Charity



Medicine

## Taiwan



- Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital held a volunteer appreciation event on February 6. Among the volunteers honored, two had contributed more than 10,000 hours of service, and two others had surpassed the 5,000-hour mark. One of the 10,000-hour honorees, Yang Li-chuan (楊立川), had volunteered six days a week at the height of his service. Though now advanced in age and walking with a cane, he still faithfully serves one day each week. His service has continued uninterrupted for nearly 20 years.

## The Philippines



- On January 17, Dr. Antonio Say (史美勝), president of the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation Philippines, was honored with the 2026 Thomasian Outstanding Medical Alumni Award for Medical Education by the University of Santo Tomas Medical Alumni Association. Dr. Say is credited with revolutionizing cataract surgery in the Philippines by introducing the phacoemulsification technique. Beyond his technical contributions, he has long inspired students to serve in remote areas through medical missions. Under his leadership, the Tzu Chi Eye Center has completed over 25,000 surgeries and served more than 180,000 patients since 2007, restoring sight and bringing renewed hope to many underprivileged families.
- In the second phase of emergency relief following Typhoon Kalmegi, cash aid was distributed on January 31 to families in the towns of Compostela and Consolacion, Cebu, to help them rebuild their homes. A total of 160 households received between 20,000 and 30,000 Philippine pesos (US\$345–\$515) each, according to family size.

## Sri Lanka

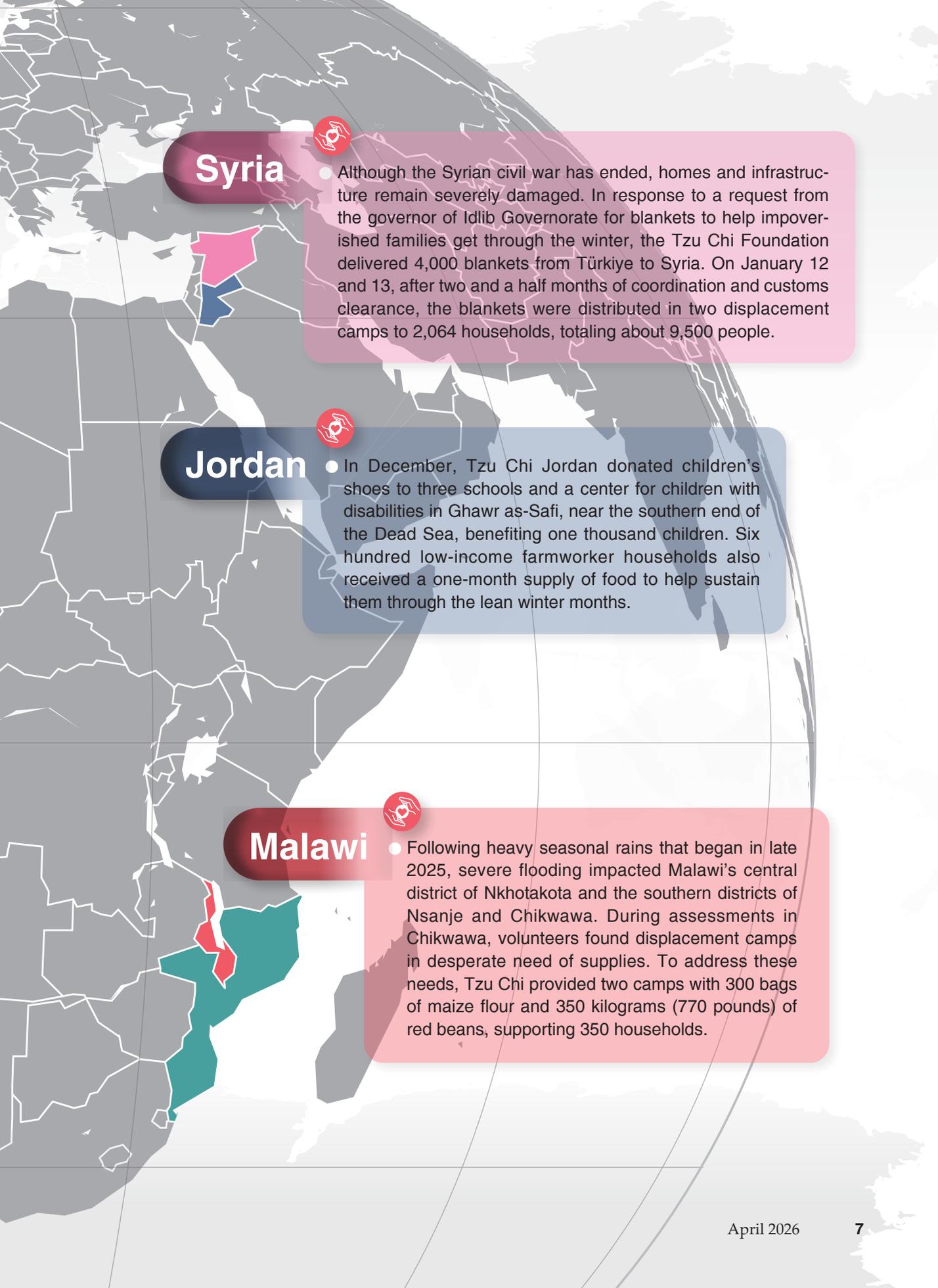
- Cyclone Ditwah struck Sri Lanka in late November 2025, heavily impacting Colombo, the country's largest city. On January 17, 2026, Tzu Chi distributed relief packages to 1,205 households in Gothatuwa, a suburb of Colombo. Each package contained over 20 kilograms (44 pounds) of rice and other daily essentials.

## Paraguay

- The indigenous Ava Guaraní people were displaced from their traditional lands, with some families resettling in 7 de Enero and Tekoha Pyahu, near Ciudad del Este. Their current settlements lie amidst swamplands close to a landfill, where 68 households rely on scavenging recyclables to earn a meager income. Following a visit by Tzu Chi volunteers, essential supplies were provided on February 1 to help sustain the families' basic needs. The aid included rice, flour, beans, cooking oil, powdered milk, and vegetable seeds.

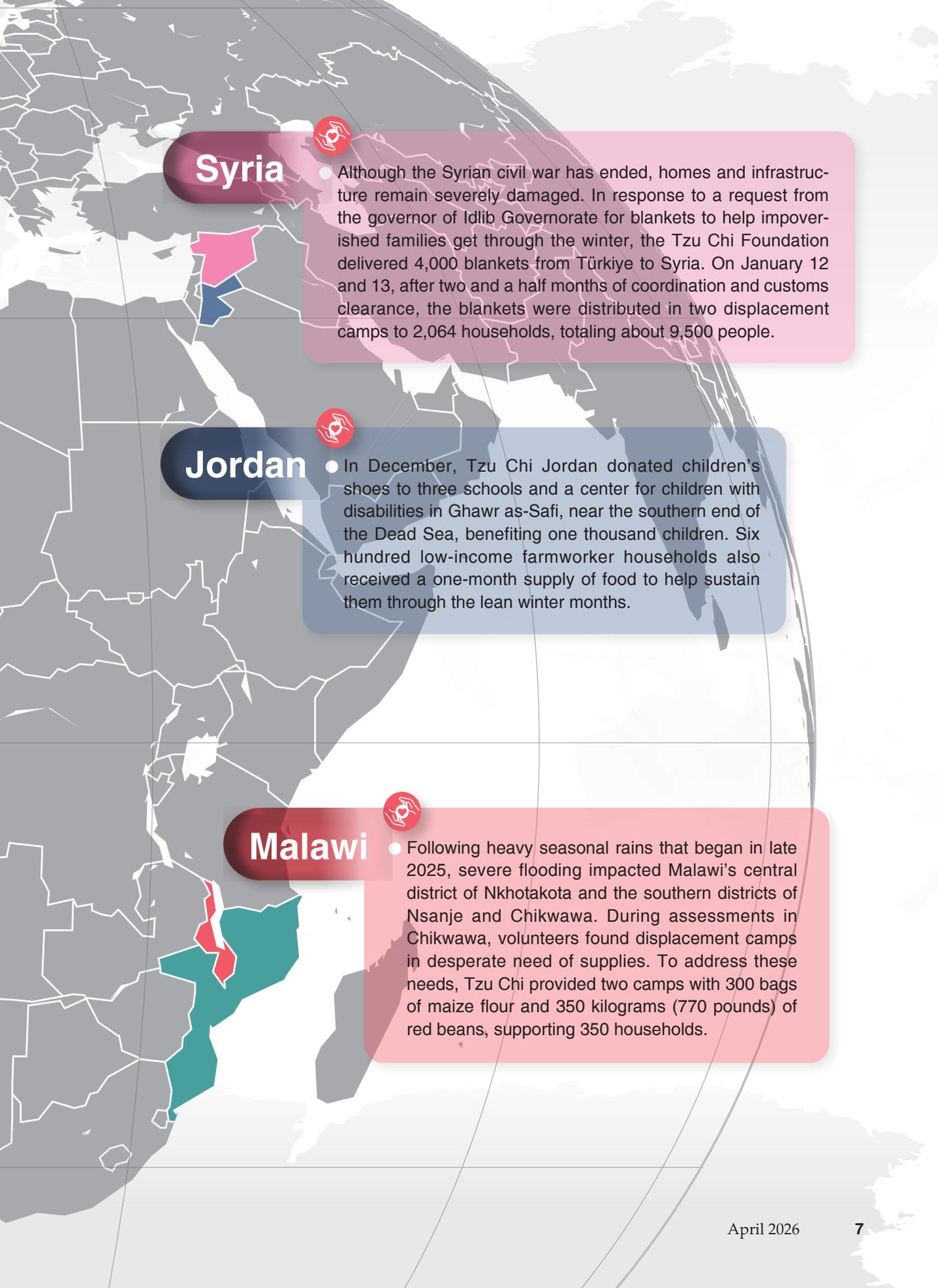
## Mozambique

- Continuous heavy rainfall in early 2026 affected over 180,000 households across seven provinces, including Sofala, Maputo, and Nampula. In late January, volunteers completed 1,567 shifts in the capital, Maputo, helping to restore disaster areas through 12 large-scale cleanup operations across five communities. In early February, food and daily necessities were distributed to 1,318 affected households in the capital, and medical teams held 15 free clinic events, serving 2,198 people. Plans are underway to provide seeds and farming tools to help families in Sofala restart cultivation, with additional distributions planned for Gaza Province.



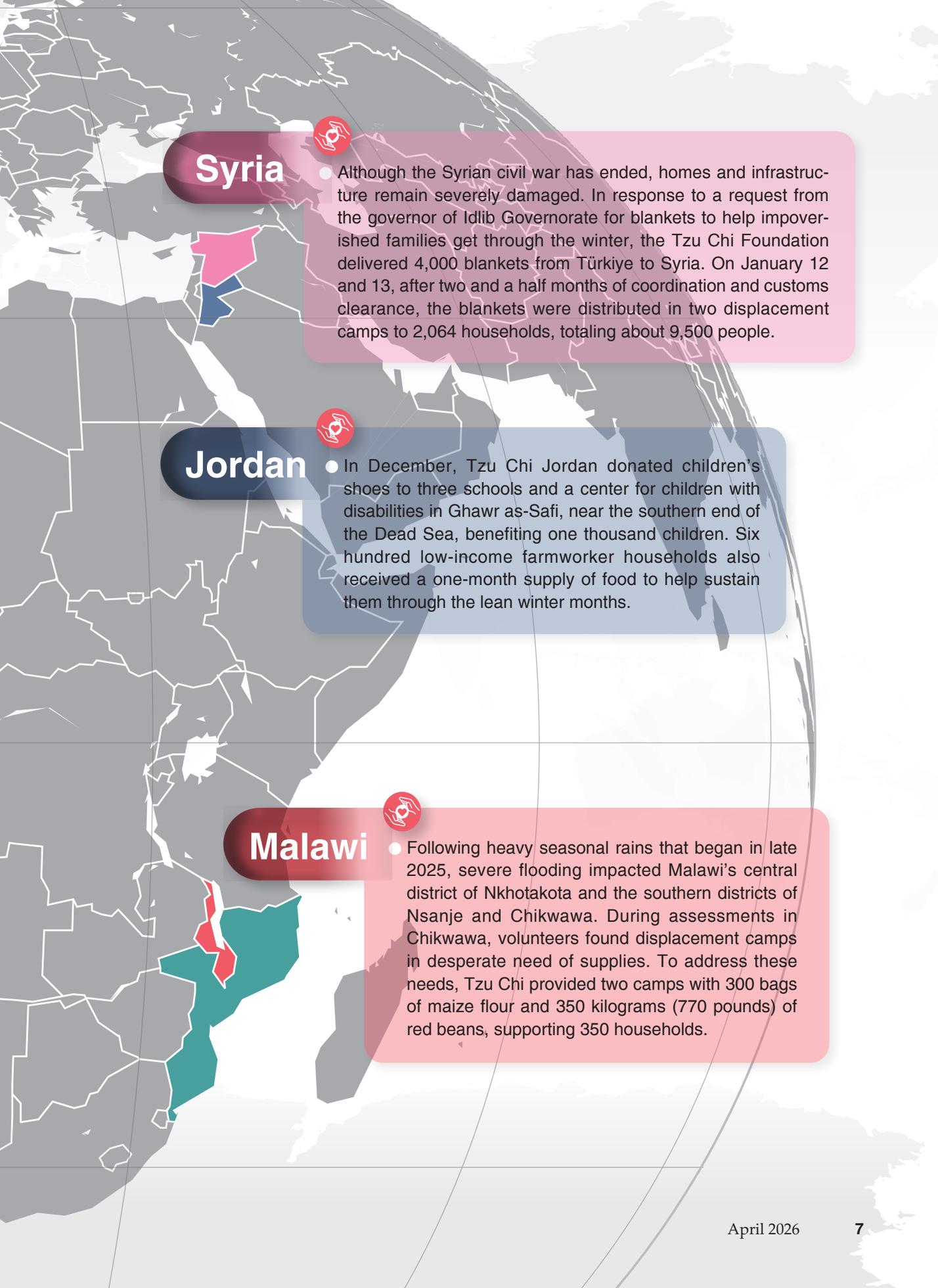
## Syria

- Although the Syrian civil war has ended, homes and infrastructure remain severely damaged. In response to a request from the governor of Idlib Governorate for blankets to help impoverished families get through the winter, the Tzu Chi Foundation delivered 4,000 blankets from Türkiye to Syria. On January 12 and 13, after two and a half months of coordination and customs clearance, the blankets were distributed in two displacement camps to 2,064 households, totaling about 9,500 people.



## Jordan

- In December, Tzu Chi Jordan donated children's shoes to three schools and a center for children with disabilities in Ghawr as-Safi, near the southern end of the Dead Sea, benefiting one thousand children. Six hundred low-income farmworker households also received a one-month supply of food to help sustain them through the lean winter months.



## Malawi

- Following heavy seasonal rains that began in late 2025, severe flooding impacted Malawi's central district of Nkhotakota and the southern districts of Nsanje and Chikwawa. During assessments in Chikwawa, volunteers found displacement camps in desperate need of supplies. To address these needs, Tzu Chi provided two camps with 300 bags of maize flour and 350 kilograms (770 pounds) of red beans, supporting 350 households.



Women from Laxmipur Village, Lumbini,  
learn grass weaving in March 2025, guided  
by instructor Subhauti Pal (left). LIN JIA-RU

A woman in a blue and green sari is shown in profile, focused on weaving a large, round, light-colored basket. She is wearing several red bangles on her right wrist. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in traditional attire, suggesting a community setting. The overall tone is warm and focused.

# Breaking Cycles, Building Futures

## Tzu Chi's Vocational Programs in Nepal

By Bai Ru-lu, Goh Lam Kia, and  
Anish Manandhar

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting  
Photos by Ramesh Karki

*Tzu Chi volunteers have set up programs in Lumbini and Kapilvastu, Nepal, to teach valuable skills to women often restricted by caste and patriarchal norms. As sewing machines click, mushrooms flourish, and deft fingers weave handicrafts, these women are gaining a chance to rise out of poverty and become self-reliant.*

It was another misty morning. Radha Upadhyaya was already busy in her courtyard, scrubbing pots with a mixture of lime and soap. Though she is in her 60s, the demands of daily labor have not eased with age. She and her husband live in Barmeli Village, Ward 6 of Kapilvastu, Nepal. Their home is a fragile mud-brick house that sometimes crumbles. They raise cattle together on informally cultivated land, gather sand from nearby rivers, and tend a small, infertile plot of farmland just to get by.

All three of their children left school early to seek work abroad. They have since started families of their own, but their lives remain financially strained. Though the children have occasionally sent money home to help when their parents were ill, Upadhyaya said, “We can’t always expect to lean on our children. My kids don’t even have their own houses. We have to stand on our own two feet.”

Seeking that independence, she visited the Tilaurakot Community Learning Center on September 21, 2025, to join Tzu Chi’s mushroom cultivation workshop. A bag of mushroom spawn costs about 75 Nepalese rupees (US\$0.50), and the quality and quantity of eventual yields depend on temperature, care, and harvest timing. But for her, the potential of a good harvest represents more than just a new source of income—it offers a step toward greater self-sufficiency and dignity.

On the center’s second floor, a sewing workshop houses 12 machines, where local women work from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The facility opened in late July 2025. The women began by learning to sew straight lines, gradually mastering the machinery. They also built a professional workplace culture along the way—arriving on time, keeping the space clean, and taking collective responsibility for equipment and other property.

The third floor offers yet a different scene. There, a group of young people tap away at keyboards, practicing commands like copy, cut, and paste. Supported by a teacher, an assistant, and four volunteers, they are learning basic computer skills to improve their employment prospects.

These programs are just the first steps in the broader vision of Tzu Chi volunteers working in

Lumbini and Kapilvastu. Over the past three years, Tzu Chi has provided vocational training and explored products suitable for mass production to create local jobs. The hope is that one day, these products or skills will earn government certification for their quality, helping villagers break the cycle of poverty and achieve true independence.

### **National certification**

Prince Siddhartha was born in Lumbini more than 2,500 years ago and was raised in Kapilvastu. After confronting the realities of aging, sickness, and death, he left the palace to follow a spiritual path—a journey that ultimately opened the way for future generations to benefit from the wisdom of the Dharma.

Tzu Chi established a presence in Lumbini in April 2022 to honor the Buddha and uplift the needy in his birthplace. In November 2023, volunteers began to be regularly stationed in Kapilvastu, another significant site in the Buddha’s life. The foundation now provides long-term support to roughly 80 households across both regions. It also offers free medical services and educational aid for local communities. Vocational training, in particular, has become a central focus of this work.

Formal education typically ends after the 10th or 12th grade in Lumbini’s rural villages, as few families have the means to provide the education and training their children would need to pursue a professional career. Most men stay on to farm ancestral lands, while young women are prepared for marriage.

Cecelia Ong (王慈惟), a Malaysian Tzu Chi volunteer, was among the first to arrive in the region more than three years ago. She has observed firsthand through years of home visits that many families are weighed down by debts passed down from previous generations. The primary reason, she explains, is the need to raise dowries for daughters’ marriages. Although microfinance institutions offer loans to farmers and women, the money rarely leads to sustainable income. Instead, families fall into a debt trap—taking out new loans to repay earlier ones—creating a vicious cycle in which some



spend their entire lives working just to pay off what they owe.

What Ong finds most heartbreaking is the hidden cost of this poverty. When families struggle, daughters are often the first to be pulled out of school. This interruption doesn't just end their education; it closes off future opportunities. Compounding the problem, few industries have taken root locally, and job prospects are extremely limited.

Ong believes that self-sufficiency is the only way to change the course of these women's lives. "That's why we started sewing classes," she explained. "Our local volunteers went door to door asking girls if they wanted to participate. Even when they were interested, we still had to obtain their families' permission to let them leave home

**Singaporean Tzu Chi volunteer Teoh Ai Ping (張愛彬, second from right) checks in on students' progress on July 2, 2025, during a basic computer skills class at the Tilaurakot Community Learning Center in Kapilvastu.**

for lessons." The goal was never just to create a hobby class for mending clothes. The vision was professionalization—preparing these women to pass national exams and become certified tailors.

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), Nepal's national apex body for technical and vocational education, oversees and administers such certification exams. Because the machines at the testing site were outdated, Tzu Chi transported its own



equipment to the venue. With the lighting also inadequate, Ong applied for permission for volunteers to enter and use their mobile phones to supplement the lighting, helping students trained by Tzu Chi complete their tests. Moved by these actions, some students said, “Master Cheng Yen has used such care and love to lift us up.”

In these rural areas, even basic supplies are scarce. Scissors are not a standard household tool—some women even use sickles to trim their

nails. And because many left school early, they initially struggled with basic math and measurements. Examiner Kanel Arjun expressed her surprise at Tzu Chi, noting that she had never seen an NGO dedicate such sustained efforts to training rural women for national certification.

Tzu Chi has offered five advanced courses since its sewing program in Lumbini began in October 2022. A total of 71 women have graduated, including 11 who obtained national tailoring certification.



Ong's next goal is to have the program accredited by CTEVT. In late November 2025, the foundation received notice that its teaching curriculum had passed review, clearing the way to formally submit the accreditation application.

### Building confidence

Tzu Chi's basic sewing courses run for six months and are tuition-free, covering 21 essential sewing skills, along with the math needed for tai-



Tzu Chi established the Sewing and Entrepreneurship Training Center at Karuna Girls College in Lumbini in May 2025. The treadle sewing machines there (left) are equipped with motors, enabling faster sewing when power is available, but can be powered manually during frequent outages. LEE LAY SIM

A graduate of a Tzu Chi advanced sewing course wears a self-made garment during a graduation ceremony on May 17, 2025, as she receives her certificate from Venerable Bhikkhu Maitri and other guests. The Venerable noted that while some local organizations offer tailoring courses, none provide the kind of support Tzu Chi does in helping trainees pass national-level certification exams. LIN JIA-RU

loring. Students who pass an exam can move on to an eight-month advanced course, where they gain the skills to take on independent commissions or even serve as instructors in Tzu Chi's classes.

Sakina Khatun, who joined Tzu Chi's sewing program in 2023, left school in fourth grade to help with household chores, following the path of her older sister, who married at 18. With Tzu Chi's guidance, she passed the national certification exam in May 2025, at just 20 years old, and became a sewing instructor. She is now also a working tailor, earning 300 Nepalese rupees (US\$2) for each garment she makes.

Yet her success is shadowed by tradition. She



recently confided to volunteers that her parents were planning to marry her off to a man working in the Middle East. “I’ve never even met him,” she shared. “I truly don’t want to marry a stranger.”

This sense of uncertainty is common. When asked about their future, many students respond with blank stares. Bound by local customs, some women have never left their home villages. For them, even a simple trip to the city, with its rushing traffic and crowds, can be physically overwhelming, leaving them pale and disoriented.

The sewing program, however, is giving these women a chance to take control of their lives. Bandhana Chaudhary, for example, once lived the precarious life typical of slum dwellers, often unsure where her next meal would come from. Today, her tailoring income ensures her family has food and medicine and, most importantly,

**Volunteers measure underprivileged students at Shree Madhubani Secondary School in September 2024 to provide them with uniforms handmade by teachers and trainees of Tzu Chi’s sewing classes in Lumbini.**

AMARKESH MOURYA

allows her to pay her son’s school fees. “I want to help him become a doctor,” she said.

Another student, Swastika Chaudhary, has worked in the sewing program for two years. “At Tzu Chi, I’ve learned discipline, how to help others, and how to show love and care,” she said. “I plan to become a sewing instructor.” Ong elaborated, “We’re not just teaching them to earn money. We want them to go on to care for their communities. Once women are empowered, they can help other women.”

Tzu Chi has also set up the Sewing and

Entrepreneurship Training Center at Karuna Girls College, housing 20 electric sewing machines. Volunteer Rakesh Tripathi shared that the college was founded by his brother, Venerable Metteyya Sakyaputta, specifically to cultivate the potential of women in Lumbini. Center director Baijnath praised the students' efforts, noting they produced 4,000 high-quality gift bags in just a few months. "This center helps married women continue to grow and achieve self-reliance," he observed.

In Mahadeva Village, volunteer Santosh Maurya offered his own space for Tzu Chi to set up its first community center in Lumbini in July 2024. Seeing the center in their own neighborhood gave fathers and husbands the confidence to allow their wives and daughters to attend classes there. Today, around 150 women learn sewing at the center each day.

Ong shared a lighthearted observation from her home visits: "Village elders said that now, if a girl or woman steps outside, you can immediately tell whether she has been to Tzu Chi!" At its core, Tzu Chi's sewing classes are about building women's confidence. The curriculum goes beyond technical skills. By listening daily to Master Cheng Yen's teachings and receiving basic etiquette training, many students have undergone a profound transformation in both their demeanor and conduct.

Instructor Puja Khadka watched with pride during the May 2025 graduation ceremony as students wore garments they had sewn themselves. For her, it was more than a display of their craft; it was a symbol of bravely pursuing one's dreams and breaking personal limitations. "This program opens the door to the outside world for the students," she said.

Dr. Tang Kiat Beng (陳吉民), deputy CEO of Tzu Chi Malaysia, has been based in Lumbini for over three years. Having witnessed firsthand the systemic barriers of the caste system and gender inequality, he said, "I am moved to tears every time I see a

## Tzu Chi Vocational Training Programs in Nepal



Kapilvastu

- **Tilaurakot Community Learning Center:**  
Sewing workshop, computer classes, English classes
- **Barmeli Village, Ward 6:**  
Mushroom cultivation workshop

Lumbini Cultural Municipality

- **Tzu Chi Office:**  
Sewing classes, soap-making workshop
- **Mahadeva Community Center:**  
Sewing classes
- **Khudabagar Community Learning Center:**  
Sewing classes
- **Adarsha Community Learning Center:**  
Sewing and computer classes
- **Karuna Girls College:**  
Sewing and Entrepreneurship Training Center
- **Laxmipur Village:**  
Handicraft courses (grass weaving)



woman graduate from our sewing program. They are finally leaving the confines of their mud houses. With an income, they begin to see the value of education. Our next step is to train them in entrepreneurship, management, and even fashion design to help them eventually launch their own brands.”

Perhaps the most significant shift is the transition from being recipients of aid to becoming providers of it. Dr. Tang said that when students

save a handful of rice each day for the needy or visit schools to distribute the uniforms they have sewn, they often share, “We never imagined we could help others, too.”

### **The mushroom mission begins**

Although Tzu Chi’s sewing program was already empowering local women, 75-year-old Singaporean volunteer Willy Ang (洪德謙) saw that villagers needed additional livelihood



options—ones with lower barriers to entry and minimal startup costs. The poverty he witnessed in Barmeli Village, Kapilvastu, weighed heavily on him. “Villagers turn to alcohol to cope with having no income and no future,” he said. “We must help them find a way to earn a living.”

In May 2025, Ang and local volunteer and Tzu Chi staff member Aliza Chaudhary traveled to a mushroom farm in the hills of Tansen to learn cultivation techniques firsthand. Despite his age,



**Participants of Tzu Chi’s mushroom cultivation workshop in Kapilvastu carefully layer rice straw and spawn to create grow bags during a 2025 training session (above).**

**Male participants of the workshop work together to steam-pasteurize rice straw for grow bags. Some had previous experience growing mushrooms, but without formal training in proper techniques and processes, their harvests were poor.**

Ang navigated the narrow, uneven ridges between the fields to observe how the mushrooms were grown.

Tzu Chi’s “mushroom mission” began through a serendipitous connection. Arbind Mani Tripathi, an administrative supervisor in Nepal’s Ministry of Agriculture, has a son, Ashutosh, who was transformed from a rebellious school dropout into a motivated and responsible young man through his involvement in Tzu Chi activities. Wanting to give back to the foundation, Tripathi introduced volunteers to mushroom cultivation facilities and connected them with professional resources.

Because mushrooms can be grown indoors using locally available materials such as rice straw, the project held great potential for villagers. In September 2025, Tzu Chi launched a mushroom cultivation workshop for the first cohort of participants, led by Aliza Chaudhary

and fellow Tzu Chi staff member Simran Thapa, both agriculture graduates. Villagers learned careful sanitation procedures to ensure good yields: chopping rice straw, soaking it in limewater, and steaming it over a fire to pasteurize the straw. Despite protests and heavy rains delaying the delivery of mushroom spawn from Kathmandu, the villagers' enthusiasm never wavered—they cleared space in their homes and followed strict hygiene practices to ensure a successful harvest.

Participants demonstrated remarkable teamwork during the hands-on training. Men teamed up to carry heavy metal barrels for steaming the straw, while women carefully layered mushroom spawn into plastic grow bags. Challenges did arise, and some participants experienced contamination setbacks, but with Chaudhary and Thapa checking in every four days and offering guidance, most achieved successful harvests. Upadhyaya, the woman introduced at the start of this article, also faced a few contamination issues but quickly adjusted, ultimately earning 5,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$34) from fresh mushrooms and another 4,000 from dried ones. She was even invited to share her experience with the next group of trainees.

The second offering of the workshop was scheduled for December, with a goal of recruiting 30 participants. The response exceeded expectations: 42 households signed up. Ramjeet Prasad Kurmi, chair of Ward 6, encouraged the participants: "No NGO has ever provided such vocational training in our area. Please treasure this opportunity to learn."

Among the trainees, a few stood out. Krishna, a blind man in his mid-40s who sells incense for a living, was the first to sign up. He encouraged hesitant neighbors to join, and under his leadership, three households decided to learn together, sell

**Radha Upadhyaya, a resident of Kapilvastu, poses with the abalone mushrooms she cultivates at home. She appreciates that the work is easy to manage and can be done entirely at home, making it well suited to her age. She plans to expand her cultivation space in the future.**

ANISH MANANDHAR







**A cash-for-work participant inspects the quality of soap in the soap-making workshop at Tzu Chi's Lumbini office.**

LIN JIA-RU

their mushrooms jointly, and share the profits. Another participant, Pabitra, was an expectant mother just 15 days from her due date when she joined. Her family had lost their source of income after their five water buffalo were injured in a fire and stopped producing milk. Determined to find a new path, she told volunteers, "Mushroom farming allows us to turn local resources into quick returns with very little cost. I want to master this."

Volunteers believe that a stable income can help children stay in school and may also reduce domestic violence and alcohol abuse. "If we help pave the way, villagers will walk it themselves," they say. Reflecting on her role, Aliza Chaudhary added, "If it weren't for Tzu Chi, I wouldn't have realized these pockets of poverty existed right in my own backyard. I want to use my education to create job opportunities for my own people."

Willy Ang continues to work tirelessly for the villagers, planning improvements to cultivation facilities. "The look of satisfaction in the villagers' eyes is all the reward we need," he said. "It makes all our work worth it. We want them to realize that with mindfulness and an open heart, anything is possible. As Master Cheng Yen says, 'We all have unlimited potential.'"

According to surveys, mushrooms are in demand in Nepal but are not easy to obtain con-

sistently, largely because most growers produce only small quantities at a time. While villagers trained by Tzu Chi currently grow mushrooms in small batches, the Great Love Village under construction in Kapilvastu offers a glimpse of a larger future. There, a large-scale mushroom facility could eventually be established, giving trained villagers an opportunity to work as skilled staff.

### **Moving forward**

Tzu Chi has also launched other programs to help villagers build sustainable livelihoods. In Laxmipur Village in Lumbini, women use slower periods in the farming cycle to learn how to weave sitting mats and household items from locally harvested grass. The craft draws on indigenous resources and fits naturally into the rhythm of village life. Under the guidance of instructors with legal harvesting permits, villagers gather the grass they use from natural growing areas in the northern part of Lumbini Garden, near the World Peace Pagoda. Fibers harvested in July are especially prized for their flexibility and strength, making them ideal for high-quality handmade products. Villagers collecting the plants follow strict guidelines to ensure the grass can regenerate each year, balancing livelihood needs with environmental care.

The soap-making workshop at the Tzu Chi office in Lumbini likewise makes use of locally available materials. Volunteers and women participating in a cash-for-work program use neem leaves to produce natural soap. Initially shared as gifts, the soap has gradually begun to generate income through customer orders.

The Lumbini Tzu Chi Campus, scheduled for completion later this year, will provide dedicated spaces to connect and expand these vocational training programs. Dr. Tang Kiat Beng expressed deep gratitude that Tzu Chi will soon have a permanent home in the Buddha's birthplace, adding that he has been deeply encouraged by the emergence of local volunteers who, like bodhisattvas rising from the earth, have stepped forward to share in the work.

"The road ahead is still long, and the responsibilities are great," he said, "but we will keep moving forward." ❊

# In the Space of a Greeting

By Wu Hsiao-ting    Painting by Su Fang-pei

*True happiness is learning to receive love in all its forms.*



Ever since messaging apps became common—such as LINE, popular in Taiwan—staying in touch with friends and family has become so much easier. Many seniors love sending daily “senior graphics,” the kind featuring beautiful images paired with wholesome quotes. For example, a photo of a beautiful sunrise might carry the words, “Be grateful for each peaceful day and cherish every moment of happiness. Wishing you a good morning!” Or a painting of a child’s hand holding a flower might be paired with “Happiness lies in letting go, fortune in kindness, and joy in simplicity. Have a great weekend.”

My sister once mentioned that these messages were all very similar and felt somewhat clichéd. I told her that I actually make a point to read them. I take the blessings to heart and think about the sender’s kindness. Even if the sense of peace or boost of encouragement lasts for only a short moment before I’m swept back into a busy day, I still see such messages in a positive light.

This conversation made me think about how

the same gesture can be interpreted very differently depending on who gives it. Take checking in by text, for instance. When parents tell their children to keep in touch with regular messages, many kids—especially teenagers—see it as nagging or surveillance. But when a boyfriend or girlfriend wants the same kind of check-ins, it’s often received very differently. Instead of irritation, the response is warmth: *They care about me so much; they’re being so sweet.*

The words may be identical, yet the reactions are worlds apart. When I was younger, I grew impatient with my parents’ constant reminders. But as I’ve grown older, I’ve realized that every “nag” is, at heart, an expression of love. Learning to receive such comments with gratitude has made me gentler and more at peace. And as I age and become more aware of life’s impermanence, I begin to cherish even the smallest interactions.

At the start of last year, my mother began showing signs of dementia. The greetings and care I once took for granted are now mostly memories. Since her illness began, Mom, who was once a fantastic cook, has rarely wanted to cook, and sometimes simply forgets how to make certain dishes. But last week, when my sister and I returned home for a visit, she unexpectedly offered to cook us sesame oil eggs—our favorite. Her offer moved us nearly to tears. In remembering our favorite dish, she showed that her love for us still endured.

Love does not always arrive gracefully or in the form we expect. Sometimes it appears as a clichéd text, an unnecessary reminder, or in a small offer. But looking for the kindness in every gesture, and cherishing every warm moment in the present—these are the simplest and surest ways to make life beautiful. ❊

# The Kindness That Lives On

By Lin Li-juan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Painting by Wen Mu

*The kindness that once saved her family now continues through her own hands.*

“When my father learned that he was facing death, he showed an incredibly strong will to live,” recalled Yang Xiuli (楊秀莉).

That was many years ago, but she still remembers receiving a tearful call from her mother, who told her that her father had been diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer. Yang rushed home in a panic, terrified that the pillar of the family was about to collapse, and worried whether her chronically ill mother could bear the blow.

At the hospital, her father pleaded, “Please help me get treatment. Even if I die in the hospital, I’ll have no regrets.” At the time, Taiwan had not yet implemented national health insurance, and her father had no private coverage. Enormous medical expenses compounded by the family already struggling to make ends meet left Yang so overwhelmed she could hardly breathe. Her deep filial devotion was mixed with desperation; she was determined to save him but crushed by their financial situation.

She could think of only one way to raise enough money: to work at a hostess bar, where women are paid to entertain male customers. Such women can earn hundreds of thousands of New Taiwan dollars a month. But the thought terrified her. How could she face such an environment and all kinds of customers?

Soon thereafter, while receiving aid from Tzu Chi at Yuan Tong Temple in Pingtung—the coun-

ty in southern Taiwan where her family lived—Yang unexpectedly ran into her former home economics teacher, Zeng Yue-jiu (曾悅久). The teacher asked with concern, “How have you been? Are you facing any difficulties?”

“Ms. Zeng,” Yang said, holding back tears, “I’m thinking of working at a hostess bar.”

After listening to her story, Ms. Zeng gently replied, “How would your father feel if he found out you were working in such an establishment? How could he bear it?”

The words struck Yang deeply. She realized she had been too caught up in her own emotions to consider the devastating effect her actions might have on her father and family. The conversation with her former teacher helped her see beyond her desperation.

“Don’t worry, we will walk this path with you,” reassured Ms. Zeng, already a Tzu Chi volunteer.

Yang’s relatives and friends soon began offering help as well, quietly slipping her 500 or 1,000 NT dollars (about US\$15–30) when they could. Her colleagues also found discreet ways to contribute from their monthly salaries without hurting her pride.

Thanks to everyone’s support, her father was able to receive treatment, though he ultimately passed away. “You must remember the names of everyone who has helped us, and when you are able, you must repay their kindness,” her father



had told her while he was still alive. After his death, Yang felt a profound sense of responsibility.

“Carrying this debt of gratitude on my shoulders felt incredibly heavy,” Yang admitted. But when she tried to return the money one by one, no one would accept it. Instead, they insisted that she use it to support her family.

It was then that someone told her, “These people’s kindness is meant to be paid forward, not returned; even paying back all the money wouldn’t

fully repay their kindness anyway.” Those words lifted the burden from her shoulders. She realized that passing on the love she had received was far more meaningful than trying to repay it.

Inspired by the selfless care of those around her and this newfound understanding, Yang dedicated herself to social service. Today, when she helps others, she feels an abiding sense of joy in her heart. Through her journey, she learned that the truest way to honor kindness is to help it keep flowing. ♣

Tzu Chi and the SDGs

# Global Partnerships in Action

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Hualien headquarters

*Tzu Chi has collaborated with over 30 international humanitarian organizations to provide aid in war zones, disaster areas, and regions affected by health crises. Through these united efforts, the foundation has extended its reach beyond its own operational limits to bring love to places of suffering.*



Among the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 17—Partnerships for the Goals—is the lynchpin for the success of the other 16. Today's global challenges—from climate change and public health crises to poverty and hunger—are so complex that no single government or civil society organization can address them alone. Many small

and mid-sized nations, reeling from conflict or natural disasters, cannot recover on their own. Only through cross-sector collaboration, with diverse partners pooling resources and expertise, can these problems be addressed more effectively.

As Tzu Chi approaches its 60th anniversary, it remains guided by the principle of directness,



In Sierra Leone, Tzu Chi works with the Lanyi Foundation to offer vocational training that helps empower women and lift their families out of poverty.

MICHAEL MAZUR

with volunteers personally delivering aid to those in need. While maintaining this core approach, the foundation also places great importance on interfaith and cross-border partnerships. In addition to its cooperation with the United Nations' efforts, Tzu Chi has worked with more than 30 humanitarian organizations, leveraging their networks, know-how, and logistical

strengths to ensure timely aid.

### **A light in the darkness**

"We extend our deepest gratitude to all who contributed to this noble mission, including Tzu Chi, Doctors of the World, and everyone involved in making it a reality," said Samer Arabi, director of Syria's Idlib Health Directorate. Arabi was

speaking on behalf of the Syrian government and people at the opening ceremony of the Kafr Takharim Primary Health Care Center in Idlib Governorate.

The facility, formerly known as the Kelly Primary Health Care Center, began operations in September 2025. Its story, however, dates back to the February 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes. In response to this disaster, Tzu Chi launched relief efforts in Türkiye’s quake-stricken zone. Northern Syria, though also severely affected, was mired in an ongoing civil war, making it impossible for Tzu Chi volunteers in Türkiye to cross the border to provide assistance.

Moved by the plight of Syrian people who had endured years of conflict only to be struck by seismic catastrophe, Tzu Chi reached out to Doctors of the World Türkiye (Dünya Doktorları Derneği) to explore the possibility of a joint medical mission in hard-hit Idlib Governorate. The two sides signed a formal agreement in March 2023 and established the Kelly Primary Health Care Center in a displacement camp area in Kelly, Idlib Governorate. Under the partnership, Tzu Chi funded the procurement of medical equipment and supplies as well as the recruitment of medical personnel.

In terms of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, this collaboration advances SDG 17 by mobilizing and sharing financial resources, expertise, and technology (Target 17.16), and by promoting effective partnerships among public institutions, the private sector, and civil society (Target 17.17).

In fact, the partnership between Tzu Chi and Doctors of the World—also known as Médecins du Monde—goes back to the early 1990s. In 1993, the two organizations worked together to provide health assistance in Ethiopia, including rebuilding medical facilities, training health workers, establishing medical record systems, and improving pharmacy management. They cooperated again the following year to provide emergency food and medical aid in Rwanda in the wake of a civil war. Decades later, in the 2020s, the two organizations once more joined hands, this time to support vulnerable communities in war-torn Syria.

By then, Syria had been embroiled in a civil war for more than a decade, and delivering aid into active conflict zones was nearly impossible without reliable assurances of safety for both personnel and supplies. Unlike Tzu Chi, Doctors of the World Türkiye had been operating inside Syria for many years and had built strong local networks and information channels. With their experience in sustaining medical services amid ongoing fighting, partnering with them helped reduce unnecessary risks.

In 2023, the Kelly Primary Health Care Center began operating, bearing the logos of both Doctors of the World and Tzu Chi. Most of Doctors of the World’s medical sites in Syria relied on U.S. funding, but when that support was withdrawn after a change in the U.S. administration, the organization’s medical services nearly came to a halt. The Kelly center, however, remained operational. It became a faint light in the darkness, a lifeline of hope for people suffering in the midst of the conflict.

Sarah Chu (褚于嘉), from the Global Partnership and Youth Development Office at Tzu Chi’s headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, explained that the Kelly center offered internal medicine, gynecology, and pediatrics, including prenatal and postnatal care. Though the services were basic, they were vital for vulnerable elderly people, women, and children. “They also provided psychological counseling and support,” she said. “Many people were under immense psychological strain after years of living under war conditions and being forced to flee their homes for displacement camps. Mental health support was therefore included alongside general medical care.”

In December 2024, Syria’s 14-year civil war finally came to an end. The Kelly center was no longer forced to operate under the constant threat of sudden evacuation, waiting for the fighting to pause before reopening. Even so, the burden on medical staff remained heavy. Faisal Hu (胡光中), head of Tzu Chi Türkiye, noted that “from the renewal of our partnership agreement in February 2025 through July, the center recorded more than 17,000 patient visits. These figures show how great the local need for medical care is.”



Through a partnership between Tzu Chi and Doctors of the World Türkiye, the Kelly Primary Health Care Center provided essential medical services in northern Syria. It recorded about 3,000 patient visits each month during its operation, from 2023 to 2025.

ABOVE: COURTESY OF TZU CHI TÜRKIYE; RIGHT: COURTESY OF DOCTORS OF THE WORLD TÜRKIYE

As displaced people gradually returned to their homes, patient visits to the Kelly center declined. At the same time, the original clinic, which had been built from shipping containers, showed signs of aging and deterioration. Tzu Chi and Doctors of the World Türkiye therefore asked the newly established Idlib Governorate government to help secure a more suitable facility. The authorities identified an abandoned hospital in Kafr Takharim that had fallen into disuse during the war. Following renovations, the Kelly center relocated to this new site. The facility added a laboratory and was renamed the Kafr



Takharim Primary Health Care Center. With its upgraded infrastructure, it can now provide better care to the 80,000 residents in the surrounding areas.

Tzu Chi hopes the Kafr Takharim center will heal not only bodies but also hearts. Tzu Chi volunteer Faisal Hu addressed the crowd in Arabic at its opening ceremony, saying, "This center is a

# Tzu Chi's International Humanitarian Partners

SOURCE: 2024 TZU CHI ANNUAL REPORT



home for all Syrians and for anyone in need.”

## Across faiths and borders

Countless examples from Syria to the Gaza Strip and beyond show Tzu Chi’s love and care being delivered through partner organizations to communities in need, regardless of geography or faith.

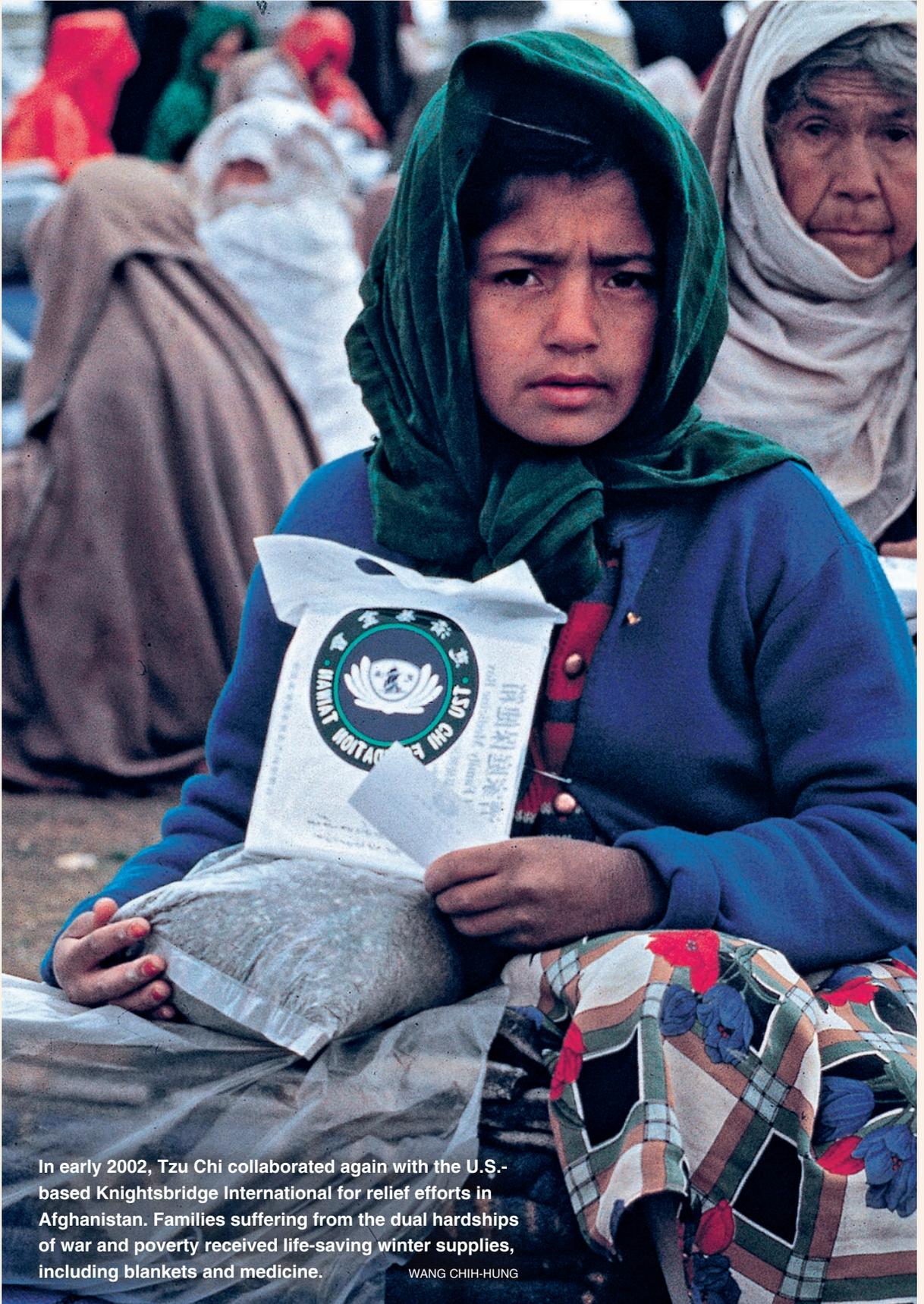
Among these collaborations, Tzu Chi has partnered with Knightsbridge International to support earthquake survivors and internally displaced people in Afghanistan. It has worked with Caritas Internationalis, a Catholic organization, to assist Ukrainian refugees in Poland and to provide relief in Sierra Leone and Haiti. Tzu Chi has also joined forces with the Islamic Development Bank to fund eye-care programs in six African countries, and with the Camillians, a Catholic religious order, to aid flood victims in Kenya and support Ukrainian refugees.

This partner-based approach traces its origins to May 1991, when Tzu Chi volunteers in the United States supported flood victims in

Bangladesh. The foundation had no prior experience in international aid at that time, so volunteers entrusted the money they raised to the Red Cross to carry out the aid work. This marked Tzu Chi’s first step into international disaster relief.

Later that summer, major flooding hit eastern and central China. As Tzu Chi conducted relief efforts, it began to formalize the principles that would guide its aid work—directness, priority, timeliness, respect, and practicality. From that point on, Tzu Chi volunteers almost always traveled in person to disaster areas to assess needs, distribute supplies, and provide free medical services. This commitment to “being there” became a defining feature of the foundation’s humanitarian work.

That approach was put to the test at the end of 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought international travel to a near standstill. With volunteers unable to cross borders, partnering with humanitarian organizations became the most viable way for Tzu Chi to continue delivering aid internationally.



In early 2002, Tzu Chi collaborated again with the U.S.-based Knightsbridge International for relief efforts in Afghanistan. Families suffering from the dual hardships of war and poverty received life-saving winter supplies, including blankets and medicine.

WANG CHIH-HUNG



**Ukrainian refugee children in Moldova receive psychosocial support through a collaborative effort between Tzu Chi and IsraAID, an Israeli humanitarian organization (above).** COURTESY OF TZU CHI USA

**A man dishes out rice porridge to residents in the Gaza Strip, part of a joint humanitarian initiative between Tzu Chi volunteers in Türkiye and the Taipei Grand Mosque.** COURTESY OF FAISAL HU

During the pandemic, Tzu Chi provided aid, including medical equipment, supplies, and personal protective equipment, to 98 countries and regions worldwide. Partnerships with faith-based and humanitarian organizations played a crucial role in ensuring that aid reached communities facing urgent need.

In India, for example, Tzu Chi had no branch offices before the pandemic. By contrast, Catholic religious orders such as the Camillians and the Missionaries of Charity had been operating in the country for decades and had large networks of local clergy and volunteers. Tzu Chi therefore entrusted these groups with much of the on-the-ground work, including procuring, receiving, and distributing supplies. Priests and nuns helped distribute food to vulnerable communities and delivered essential protective equipment to frontline healthcare workers.

“Following Tzu Chi’s guidelines, they also compiled recipient rosters and carried out distributions in the spirit of gratitude, respect, and love,” explained Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), Tzu Chi’s chief international affairs officer. “Where Tzu Chi volunteers couldn’t go, these religious partners became the foundation’s eyes and hands.”

As a result, tens of millions of masks, gloves, face shields, protective gowns, and other protective items were delivered in time to places of need, helping to safeguard many lives during the pandemic.

### **Trustworthy partnerships**

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored just how essential partnerships are for humanitarian work. But how does Tzu Chi determine whether a potential partner is trustworthy, and how does it ensure that resources entrusted to partners are used appropriately?

“To answer that, we conduct due diligence to confirm that potential partners are not involved in money laundering, terrorism financing, fraud, or other scandals,” said Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of Tzu Chi’s charity mission. He explained that due diligence, including “Know Your Customer” verification, has become a standard requirement for international business and

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## **Glossary**

### **● Know Your Customer/Client (KYC)**

An identity verification process used by NGOs, financial institutions, or businesses before entering a partnership. KYC confirms a partner’s identity and legitimacy to help prevent money laundering, fraud, or the misappropriation of funds.

### **● Due Diligence**

A more in-depth vetting process that builds upon KYC. It not only verifies a partner’s identity and financial background but also assesses their creditworthiness, reputation, operational risks, and legal compliance. This helps ensure that the collaboration meets ethical standards and international regulations.

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public-private cooperation. Tzu Chi carefully assesses the credibility of potential partners before collaborating. Its partners apply the same rigorous standards to Tzu Chi.

“We require partners to provide supporting documentation, including annual reports, financial statements, distribution rosters, and even photos and videos of distribution activities,” Shyong added. “Tzu Chi’s own information—such as annual reports, sustainability reports, and financial statements—is also publicly available, with English versions provided. Our legal and finance departments pay special attention to these requirements.”

Tzu Chi’s partnerships all fall within the scope of its four missions—charity, medicine, education, and culture—and the foundation requires partners’ actions to align with Buddhist principles of compassion and altruism, as well as relevant laws and regulations.

“Tzu Chi has its own standards for disaster relief,” said Lin Pei-fei (林裴菲), deputy director of the Overseas Division in the Department of Religious Affairs at Tzu Chi’s headquarters. “Can partners comply with them? Can they meet requirements for results reporting and expense verification? These are all factors we must evaluate.”



In 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged India and pushed both healthcare and livelihoods to the brink of collapse, the Missionaries of Charity joined hands with Tzu Chi to distribute food and essential supplies to impoverished families (above).

Following a slum fire in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in May 2024, Tzu Chi and its partners in the country—Caritas, the Healey International Relief Foundation, and the Lanyi Foundation—conducted a 21-day meal service for affected residents.

When a potential partner passes this evaluation and demonstrates alignment with Tzu Chi's core missions, the result can be a long-term, multi-faceted collaboration. Lin cited Tzu Chi's partnership with Love Binti International as an example. This international NGO was founded by Elle Yang (楊怡庭), recognized as one of Taiwan's Ten Outstanding Young Women in 2024, and has launched multiple aid programs in Africa. Tzu Chi has worked with it to improve economic conditions, health care, and environmental protection.

"Together with Love Binti, we are improving educational infrastructure and promoting low-carbon school facilities," Lin said. "Through rural empowerment programs, we are strengthening farming and agricultural processing, sup-



porting well-drilling and rainwater collection, building ecological toilets, and providing hygiene education to improve community health."

Most notably, Tzu Chi and Love Binti identified sewing training and reusable cloth sanitary pad production as key projects for 2025, aiming to eliminate period poverty, which is the lack of



access to menstrual products and sanitation. “Reusable sanitary pads help improve hygiene and promote women’s equality,” Lin explained. “Agricultural training helps local people become self-reliant. These efforts connect directly to Tzu Chi’s missions in charity, medicine, education, and culture.”

Over the past six decades, Tzu Chi has not only built extensive partnerships to relieve suffering but has also worked to become a partner that others can trust. Facing today’s severe environmental and socioeconomic challenges, global cooperation is the only way to build a sustainable future. ❊



**Anton (left) and his family in Bekasi, West Java, happily walk through their newly completed home in 2025. They are beneficiaries of a national government housing program, with Tzu Chi among the partners.**

Indonesia's 5,000-Home Transformation

# Building Hope and Dignity

By Fikhri Fathoni, Khusnul Khotimah, and Metta Wulandari

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting Photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro



*Tens of thousands of homes in Indonesia, from Jakarta's narrow alleyways to Central Java's mountain villages, are structurally unsafe. Supporting a government initiative, Tzu Chi has undertaken the rebuilding and renovation of 5,000 homes, delivering safety and dignity to families in need.*

For some people, a safe, well-built home is a luxury. Many families across Indonesia—from crowded city corners to remote rural villages—live in houses that are barely habitable: leaking roofs, bare floors without cement or tiles, and crumbling walls so structurally weak that they seem on the verge of collapse. During the rainy season, water seeps in, leaving no part of these homes dry; under the blazing sun, heat becomes trapped inside with no way to escape. These dwellings are often cramped and lack basic amenities, including proper bathrooms.

This reality is starkly reflected in national data. According to a 2023 report by BPS–Statistics Indonesia on housing and environmental health, 37 percent of homes nationwide are classified as being in poor condition. That means that nearly four out of every ten households live in structures that urgently need improvement and may even pose safety risks.

In response to this pressing social issue, President Prabowo Subianto launched the Three Million Houses Program in November 2024. Its aim is to help families in extreme poverty and low- to middle-income groups secure safer, healthier living conditions. The initiative is focused primarily on repairing existing homes, but there are provisions for some rebuilding as well. The eventual goal is to provide one million homes in urban regions and two million in rural and coastal areas.

To achieve such objectives, Indonesia’s Ministry of Housing and Residential Areas has partnered with private companies and NGOs. Among them, Tzu Chi has committed to delivering 5,020 homes, making it the program’s largest partner. The foundation began work in January 2025 and completed over 700 homes by early December. Nearly 400 more are currently under construction.

### **A unified effort for social progress**

The more than 5,000 homes under Tzu Chi’s care are spread across ten locations on Java and Sumatra, including Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Medan, and Palembang. Liu Su-mei (劉素美), CEO of Tzu Chi Indonesia, explained that while the nation has seen steady economic growth and

social progress, many people continue to live below the poverty line. “Without a proper place to call home,” she noted, “the future for both parents and their children is severely constrained.”

Tzu Chi has been engaged in charitable work in Indonesia for 30 years, and by the end of 2025, its number of regular donors had grown to more than 2.3 million. As early as 2006, the foundation began collaborating with the Indonesian military and government to improve housing for low-income families, renovating more than 1,400 homes by 2025. Tzu Chi has also built housing villages following major disasters, including those in Aceh, Padang, Palu, Lombok, and Yogyakarta, completing a total of 8,000 homes.

Liu explained that the current project is unprecedented in both scale and geographic reach. Coordination with government agencies and residents took time, with so many homes to take care of across so many regions. Early progress was inevitably slower. She added that some families were concerned about where they would live during construction, so rental subsidies were provided to help ease the transition.

Another major challenge has been finding enough suitable contractors in each area. “Dozens of contractors must be involved when 500 homes need to be built or renovated in a single region,” Liu said. “In addition to manpower, we also have to ensure construction quality. Whether a home is built solidly is extremely important to us.”

Beyond providing shelter, the project also serves as a vital public health intervention. Dr. Helen Suryana, a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, witnessed this firsthand during a pre-construction assessment visit to Bekasi. She noted that tightly packed, poorly ventilated homes trap moisture and stale air, increasing the risk of airborne diseases, such as tuberculosis. In fact, the true number of tuberculosis cases in Indonesia is believed to be far higher than official statistics suggest, due in part to these hidden transmission environments.

### **Lighting hope in the alleyways**

For project coordinator Teksan Luis (盧德汕), narrow alleyways have proven to be the greatest obstacle. Many homes measure less than seven



square meters (75 square feet) and are located along lanes only 40 centimeters (1.3 feet) wide, making even the transport of construction materials highly difficult.

He shared an example: Although construction in Bandung began two months later than in Jakarta, it quickly pulled ahead. “Bandung has more workers,” he said, “but the alleys there are also wider, which makes transporting materials much easier.” This allowed the team to redeploy workers from Bandung to support the more difficult sites in Jakarta.

“Renovation is also far more complex than rebuilding,” he added. “You have to tear down parts of an existing house and then rebuild those parts—it’s almost like doing the job twice, which naturally takes more time.” Terrain presents additional challenges. In Banyumas Regency, Central Java, for instance, villages are spread far apart, with undulating landscapes forcing workers to haul materials longer distances, uphill and downhill.

**In November 2024, ahead of Tzu Chi’s sixth phase of home repairs in Kamal Muara, North Jakarta, homeowner Kokom Komariyah shows volunteers her rotting floorboards, explaining that the gaps are so severe that she sometimes accidentally steps into them.**

Luis admitted that he felt some apprehension when he first took on the project, concerned that residents might not cooperate or that he might not be capable enough. Yet each time he walked into a dark alleyway and saw homes without proper walls, roofs riddled with holes, beds placed above drainage ditches, or floors paved with shells, his resolve to carry on grew stronger.

“When my own business runs into difficulties, I might complain,” he said. “But then I think of the families in Kamal Muara who have endured harsh living conditions for over a decade without a word of complaint. It puts everything into perspective.



**Demolition is underway on a home in Kamal Muara at the start of Tzu Chi's sixth phase of repairs in February 2025.**

CLARISSA RUTH OCTAVIANADYA

What do I really have to complain about? I'll do my best to help see this project through, because I know this mission is truly worth the effort."

Tzu Chi selected Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Depok, and Bogor as key focus areas because behind the glossy façade of these metropolises, many overlooked corners remain. "We want to bridge the gap between rich and poor," Luis said, "and help these families step out of the shadow of poverty."

**New life for Kamal Muara**

Kamal Muara, mentioned earlier, is a coastal fishing village in North Jakarta. "It's actually

right behind Tzu Chi's Jing Si Hall," Luis explained. "But because there's no direct access, you have to take a long detour to get to the village." As a result, what should be a short trip stretches to 30 minutes and can last up to two hours in heavy traffic.

When Luis and other volunteers first began visiting the area, they found many old and dilapidated homes, with floors lower than the surrounding roads. During the rainy season or at high tide, floodwaters would enter the houses, leaving walls submerged for long periods and putting the structures at risk of collapse. Reaching some residents' homes required navigating extremely narrow paths, and once at the doorway, volunteers often had to stoop to enter. Some entrances were so tight that larger volunteers could not fit through at all.

In an attempt to keep floodwaters out, villag-

ers had raised their floors with layers of shells, which further reduced the interior height. In some homes, the floors had rotted so badly that residents and volunteers occasionally stepped into gaps and fell through.

Tzu Chi began its work in Kamal Muara in 2019, several years before the government program was launched. By 2025, the project had entered its sixth phase, with 48 homes completed, along with two mosques and the Nurul Islam Elementary School. As part of the agreement, residents committed to living in their new homes for at least ten years without selling, renting, or transferring ownership. At handover, volunteers also provided household items such as rice cookers, fans, gas stoves, tables, chairs, and beds.

The benefits of the housing renovation are evident in Kamal Muara. Take Denovan Ramadan, a fifth grader at Nurul Islam Elementary School: His family’s home was rebuilt in October 2024 and he now consistently ranks first in his class. “We used to live in a stilt house where rain would spray right through the windows,” he recalled. “Now, our home is sturdy, and we finally feel safe.”

The new house has not only motivated Denovan to study harder but has also served as a foundation for the family to improve their livelihood. While they once relied on the father’s income from selling porridge, Tzu Chi provided a food cart that allowed Denovan’s mother to start a noodle business. The family eventually bought a motor scooter to offer delivery services.

## Tzu Chi Home Repair and Reconstruction Program

Locations of 5,020 Homes:





**Hasnawati (center) and her family, residents of Kamal Muara, share a joyful moment as they move into their new home.**

The mother expressed her appreciation, saying, “This new house has brought so many blessings to our lives. Thank you, Allah!”

### **A head held high**

The morning sun cast a soft glow over the village of Somakaton in Banyumas, Central Java. Fifty-three-year-old Rasman pushed open the door to his new home. As he thought back to his old house—with walls of wood and bamboo, rainwater dripping into buckets, and mud floors—he felt nothing but deep gratitude. He was one of the beneficiaries of Tzu Chi’s renovation work in Somakaton.

Banyumas, located inland on Java, is among the country’s most impoverished regions. The local economy relies on traditional agriculture and handicrafts. The rugged, hilly terrain makes industrial development difficult, so steady, secure jobs are hard to come by. Of Banyumas’s 27 districts, Tzu Chi’s renovation project is underway in 13. Volunteers visit each household to assess its needs before construction begins, ensuring help reaches those who truly need it.

During the renovation of his home, Rasman and his family stayed with relatives behind the

house. He checked the progress every day—sometimes helping, sometimes simply sitting by the doorway watching the house take shape. On some nights, he even slept there.

Today, Rasman’s brick house stands complete, its walls freshly painted. The sturdy pillars seem to hold up a new beginning. He no longer has to worry about wind slipping through bamboo walls or rain leaking through holes in the roof. This is more than a new house—it is a restored sense of dignity. He can now walk with his head held high, moving forward with hope.

His wife, Munfaridah, used to pray for a clean, bright, and healthy home, but the dream always seemed out of reach. “My husband had faith in Tzu Chi, so I believed in them too,” she said. “Now, I am filled with gratitude. We’ll work together for this home and for our children’s future.”

Rasman works as a farm laborer, earning about 50,000 Indonesian rupiah (US\$3.20) a day. His income barely covered daily expenses, let alone the cost of building or renovating a house. But Munfaridah refused to give up. She tutored local children and saved every little bit she could, buying sheets of asbestos and partition boards to gradually strengthen their old home.

When Tzu Chi’s renovation was finished, Munfaridah was most excited to finally have the bathroom she had always dreamed of. “The old facilities were too basic,” she said. “We are so grateful for the new ones. May Allah bless you all many times over.”

Unlike older, low-slung Javanese dwellings, the new house features a higher roof and a spacious interior. “In addition to a living room,” Rasman said, “we now have three bedrooms: one for my wife and me, and two for the children.” Having a room of his own had always been the wish of their youngest son, Utaqo. Rasman was thrilled, saying they were now just waiting to move the furniture in.

The radiant smiles of families like Rasman’s fuel volunteers’ sense of mission. By racing against time to renovate and rebuild homes into safe, comfortable spaces, they are providing a sanctuary and peace for more than 5,000 households across the regions they serve. ❊

# A Place to Stand Tall

Text and photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*The 30-year-old house, once damp and run-down, is now a bright, dignified home where residents finally feel proud to open their doors.*



During a volunteer visit in February 2025, Sumi (second from right) stands inside her cramped, dimly lit, and poorly ventilated home—hardly a place fit for daily living.

**F**or Sumi, 49, every raindrop once brought anxiety, and strong winds were just as frightening. She worried about her leaking roof and feared that the house might collapse. Today, thankfully, those fears are gone. Her new home is bright and solid—a place where she can finally throw open the doors to welcome relatives and friends.

For nearly 30 years, she lived in a ramshackle, 33-square-meter house in a narrow Jakarta alley. The entrance was little more than a meter high, forcing everyone to bow. Inside, the walls were cracked, natural light was scarce, and the air was



**In their bright, clean new home, Sumi (left) and her sons finally have a comfortable space to rest and spend time together.**

stagnant. Lacking a bathroom, Sumi and her sons had to rely on public facilities.

The house was an inheritance she and her husband had once dreamed of fixing up. But when he passed away from asthma in 2020, that dream withered. Sumi provided for her family by folding paper at a printing factory, but renovation had become a distant hope.

That hope was rekindled when the family was selected for a government housing program, sup-

ported by partners including Tzu Chi. “Praise be to Allah!” Sumi said. “We struggle just to put food on the table. I’m so glad people are here to help our family have a place where we can sleep safely and live a healthier life.”

Renovation began in February 2025. While work was underway, Tzu Chi helped cover rent for the family.

Sumi’s eldest son, Haris, 29, had wanted to help his mother renovate the house, but with only a junior high education and working odd jobs, he felt powerless. He used to perform ondel-ondel (giant traditional puppets) on the streets of Tangerang and rarely came home. Now, he lives at home and helps relatives repair air conditioners while learning the trade.

Life wasn’t easy, but home had always been the most meaningful place for Haris and his brother, Alfian. “I was born and raised here,” Haris said, holding back tears. “No matter where I go, my goal is always to come back home.”

He recalled the tiny door that forced everyone to duck their heads. “It wasn’t just once or twice—we bumped our heads all the time. Our house felt like a snail’s shell,” he laughed. The old home was not just cramped but damp, often visited by scorpions and centipedes. “Now there aren’t even mice, and the air is cooler,” he added. “Before, we would sweat even with a fan running.”

“It’s hard to imagine how much this place has changed,” Sumi exclaimed. “Air flows freely, there’s no smell of mouse droppings, and the door is finally tall enough!”

During a recent visit, Tzu Chi volunteers found her relaxing on the clean, tiled floor. “The floor was just dirt before; you couldn’t lie down on it,” she said. “Now, it’s so comfortable.”

For 29 years, Sumi kept her front door shut. “Now, I can open it wide without feeling embarrassed,” she said. The renovation has also given her confidence to host guests, something she rarely did. “A few days ago, relatives came and even stayed overnight,” she beamed.

She sees the government’s program as a profound blessing. “This program is wonderful,” she said. “It lets people struggling in life finally experience what it feels like to live in a home that is secure, cozy, and welcoming!”



# An Intern's First Patient

**Narrated by Zhang He-xiang**

Compiled by Cai Jia-qi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Li Bai-shi

*The suffering of a young doctor's very first patient became a wake-up call, teaching him the true responsibility of caring for lives.*

Just over seven years ago, I began my internship at a hospital in southern Taiwan. My very first patient was a 70-year-old man suffering from liver cirrhosis, complicated by both liver and kidney failure. As part of his treatment, he was placed on vasoconstrictors.

During my rounds, I checked his limbs, listened to his chest, and palpated his abdomen. As far as I knew, everything was proceeding exactly as it should. I felt in control.

That confidence was soon shattered. On the third day, a senior resident turned to me, her voice sharp, and said, "Do you actually know the side effects of this drug? Did you examine all of the patient's skin?"

I felt a surge of defensiveness. I had checked on him every day—why was she reprimanding me? Still, I went to the patient's bedside and asked him to undress. The sight that I saw when he disrobed struck me like a physical blow.

The skin across his groin and genitals was blackened and ulcerated. Only then did he confess that it had been painful to urinate for days; he had been too embarrassed to mention discomfort in such a private area.

Very quickly, the patient's condition grew worse. Even after we stopped the medication, the necrosis continued to spread down his legs. His family ultimately decided to stop aggressive treatment, and he passed away soon after.

I was overwhelmed with guilt. I realized I had



not been thorough enough while doing my rounds. I believed I was being attentive, yet my lack of true vigilance led to devastating consequences. The memory of his suffering became a painful wake-up call.

The transition from being a medical student—where my work largely centered on assignments and reports—to frontline clinical practice marked a shift in what mattered most. My role was no longer just to fulfill a list of duties or prove to my superiors that I had done my job. What mattered most was whether I had recognized a patient's suffering in time, identified the cause, and relieved their pain at the bedside.

Simply put, a physician's primary responsibility is to the patient. True respect is earned only when a patient's pain is alleviated and their family's anxiety is eased. This man taught me, at the cost of his own life, that in medicine, we must always stay ahead of the disease. We are the ones who must pull the brake on that runaway train before it crashes into the mountainside.

Next month, I will be promoted to an attending physician in the Department of Internal Medicine at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. As I take on this greater responsibility for human lives, the alarm bell from that elderly man still echoes within me as vividly as it did then. I carry that lesson—learned through blood and tears—with me as I continue my journey caring for patients in eastern Taiwan. ❦

# Another Kind of Family Gathering

Compiled by *Tzu Chi Monthly* editorial staff

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Tzu Chi's care throughout the four seasons, from monthly home visits to year-end banquets, warms hearts and nurtures lasting connections.*

On February 1, in the heart of winter, Mr. Lu arrived at the Sanchong Jing Si Hall in New Taipei City on his mobility scooter. Crowds had gathered there for Tzu Chi's winter distribution and year-end banquet, held as the lunar year drew to a close. Volunteer Lin Yi-ling (林怡伶) helped him into a wheelchair and guided him into the bustling venue.

Mr. Lu beamed as he relished the savory radish cakes prepared by volunteers, taking in the lively scene around him. "It's been so long since I've been around so many people!" he exclaimed. To him, this was more than a feast—it felt like a family gathering.

Mr. Lu is a polio survivor. In 2021, after both of his parents passed away, he took in his sister, who was living with dementia. Despite a limited income from his job as a parking lot cashier, he assumed full responsibility for her care. He believed that it was his duty as her brother to look after her when no one else could. Eventually, with the assistance of a Tzu Chi long-term care case manager, his sister was admitted to a professional care facility, easing the heavy burden he had been carrying.

Hardship struck again in June 2023 when Mr. Lu suffered a stroke. The function of his legs deteriorated, bringing his life to an abrupt standstill. Volunteers Zhang Yu-huan (張玉環) and Huang Cai-feng (黃彩鳳) immediately reached out. Because he was physically frail and at risk of falling when going to the bathroom, they brought

him a commode chair and easy-to-wear clothing to make daily life safer and more manageable. Noticing how difficult it was for him even to get a drink of water, they placed bottled water by his bedside and purchased a water dispenser for him. They also provided emergency financial aid to help him through the long months of rehabilitation.

As his siblings passed away one after another, his world gradually grew smaller. Loneliness soon followed. Though he had hoped to return to work, his efforts were met with disappointment. Through it all, the companionship of volunteers never wavered. Despite relying on low-income subsidies, he saved spare change in a coin bank and donated it to Tzu Chi in gratitude.

At the banquet, he was surrounded by steaming food and familiar greetings. Volunteers were delighted to see him shift from being quiet and withdrawn to cheerful and engaged.

This gathering was just one part of Tzu Chi's annual winter outreach for care recipient families across Taiwan. This year's outreach began on January 17 in Taitung and included 56 events, concluding on February 10 at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien. Volunteers also delivered gifts directly to the homes of recipients unable to attend, from elderly individuals living alone in the north to residents of remote mountain villages in Kaohsiung, as well as households in Kinmen, an offshore island county. In total, nearly 27,000 households, both banquet attendees and at-home



recipients, received Tzu Chi's year-end blessings.

Each family attending a banquet carried a different story, but for this brief moment, they could set their burdens down and find peace in the warmth of community.

### Bringing the community together

Among the items distributed at the events and delivered to homes were gift cards, marking the eighth year of Tzu Chi's collaboration with a major supermarket chain. These cards allowed care recipients to purchase Lunar New Year supplies at nearby stores according to their needs. In remote villages without a branch of the chain, or for recipients unable to go out, cash was provided instead. Other gifts included multigrain biscuits, instant rice, and pumpkin soy milk powder.

Huang Li-yun (黃麗雲), a volunteer from Yuli in Hualien, pointed out that Tzu Chi added some new households to those receiving regular assistance from the foundation after the devastating barrier lake overflow in Guangfu Township last September. These households were among the guests invited

**Tzu Chi care recipients and volunteers gather around tables laden with dishes as the Tainan branch in southern Taiwan hosts a 42-table year-end banquet on February 1.**

LI QI-HUA

to the banquet held in Yuli. At the event, Mr. Shen, who has lived in Guangfu Township for nearly 80 years, expressed his gratitude: "After the disaster, Tzu Chi volunteers and other helpers from across Taiwan came to clear mud and cook for us. They made us feel that we weren't alone—and that the world is truly full of love."

Tainan had also faced severe challenges over the past year, including the Tainan-Chiayi earthquake and Typhoon Danas. Ms. Chen, whose home was damaged in the quake, attended the banquet on February 1 at Tzu Chi's Jiali office in Tainan. Because of the warmth and care Tzu Chi volunteers demonstrated while they helped restore her home, she and her husband have stepped up to serve as volunteers themselves.

These gatherings offered far more than a



**A hairstylist (left) trims a care recipient's hair during the winter distribution and year-end banquet at Tzu Chi's Songlong Road office in Taipei on January 31.**

CHI LIANG-ZHEN

**Chao You-chen (趙有誠, first from left in the right photo), superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, leads members of the hospital's medical team in serving dishes at the banquet at the Xindian Jing Si Hall on January 31.**

WAN WEN-YU

warm meal and physical gifts. Booths providing free haircuts, health consultations, and New Year's couplets added to the festive, communal atmosphere at the events.

At the Xindian Jing Si Hall, medical professionals from nearby Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital set up a station offering consultations in internal medicine, surgery, traditional Chinese medicine, and nutrition. Vice Superintendent Hsu Jung-yuan (徐榮源) noted that regular outpatient visits are often limited by time, making it difficult for doctors to fully understand a patient's background. The free consultations, however, allowed medical staff to provide more comprehensive care to vulnerable individuals. They were able to address not only physical concerns but also psychological and family-related issues, reflecting the true warmth of medical care.

Dr. Chen Jia-hui (陳家輝), a surgeon participating in such consultations for the first time, was moved by the progress he saw in care recipients who, encouraged by long-term volunteer companionship, had regained the ability to stand and walk. He also praised the integration of the consultations with Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital's fast-track referral system, which helped disadvantaged individuals connect quickly with the right specialists and shortened the time needed to access care.

The free haircut area at Tzu Chi's Shuanghe office, in New Taipei City, bustled with activity from early in the day. Although the days leading up to Lunar New Year are the busiest of the year

for the beauty industry, bridal stylist Lin Cui-li (林翠莉) wouldn't have been anywhere else. Having grown up in a financially strained family, she felt a deep empathy for those in her chair. Whether handling difficult hair or facing a shy elder, she was patient and attentive. She would gently check, "Is this length okay?" or suggest, "I can trim it this way to make it easier for you to manage. What do you think?"

Nearby, stylist You Pei-jin (游佩艷) tended to a visually impaired woman. Though she could not see her reflection in the mirror, the woman ran her hands over the layers of her newly cut hair, a look of contentment on her face. "I really enjoyed getting my haircut here today," she said. "Feeling cared for is the warmest feeling."

### **A feast beyond five stars**

The highlight everyone looked forward to was the feast. At the Tzu Chi Banqiao Campus in New Taipei City, 71 tables had been set. The cooking team spent nearly three days in a whirlwind of preparation. Volunteer Ding Yue-e (丁月娥) introduced two of the most challenging and intricate dishes: One featured handmade konjac jelly, garnished with finely shredded radish arranged like blooming flowers; the other, called "Five Blessings Arrive," was a delicate roll combining a variety of ingredients—every bite reflecting the volunteers' care and dedication.

The banquet at the Tzu Chi office on Songlong Road in Taipei showcased another example of thoughtful vegetarian cuisine. Volunteer Chen Chun-ying (陳春穎) devoted countless hours to perfecting her recipe for "Savory Mushrooms and Taro Hearts," making sure it was both deli-



cious and beautifully presented. For her, time spent in the kitchen was a way to offer her blessings to the community and to show that every guest was truly valued.

Although the year-end banquet is an annual tradition, preparing a lavish feast for 21 tables and more than 200 guests was still a major test for volunteers in Nantou. Cooking coordinator Lin Cai-yun (林彩雲) led three teams, working together on the menu design and coordinating the preparation of eight dishes.

Stepping in from the winter chill, the heat of the kitchen was palpable. Volunteer Chen Han-he (陳漢河) stood over roaring stoves, his shirt soaked through as he worked a heavy wok with a massive spatula. Nearby, 80-year-old Chen Xiuyun (陳秀雲)—her silver hair shimmering through clouds of steam—handled her knife with steady, rhythmic grace at the cutting board. Amid the aroma of glutinous oil rice, volunteer Wu Mei-li (吳美曆) displayed meticulous craftsmanship. She had hand-picked the ingredients a week in advance and begun prep work two days before

the banquet, ensuring the rice was deeply flavorful and perfectly cooked.

When the music began, Huang Cong-yi (黃聰易), in charge of serving, led a group of volunteers into the dining area, dressed in neat uniforms and holding dishes aloft with both hands. Among them was Zeng Rui-ming (曾瑞明), in his 70s, who felt privileged to serve guests at the annual event year after year. He reflected that good health is the foundation for being able to give, something that has become more apparent as he has gotten older.

Lin Jin-long (林金龍) seemed to be everywhere at once—moving between the logistics team and the dining floor, serving tables and supporting wherever he was needed. “We are not just running an event; we are building a sense of family,” he said. He hoped that through their heartfelt hospitality, the families attending would feel that Tzu Chi is always there for them—a family they can rely on—and that the warmth of the banquet would linger in their hearts long after the day ended. ❦

# The Yanshui Recycling Station's Bottle-Washing Team

**Text and photos by Huang Xiao-zhe**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

**P**hotographing and writing about Tzu Chi's recycling work for *Tzu Chi Monthly* has taken me to many recycling stations across Taiwan over the years. I thought I had seen it all—until a photo shoot at the Yanshui Recycling Station in Tainan in September 2022. There, I noticed a group of women sitting in a circle, their heads bowed in deep concentration. Curious, I stepped closer and discovered that they were meticulously washing and scrubbing recycled glass bottles—an activity I had never seen at any other station.

Tied up with other responsibilities that day, I regrettably couldn't stay to learn more. I managed only to take a few quick photos, promising myself I'd return later for a proper interview. But time has a way of slipping by; when I finally revisited those images with the intent to return, three years had already passed.

In November 2025, I finally reconnected with the Yanshui volunteers and spoke with Su Xiu-xiang (蘇秀香), a member of the bottle-washing team. To my delight, I learned that not only had they continued their work, but the entire team I had met three years earlier was still there, as dedicated as ever. This time, I was finally able to take the time to get to know the everyday stories of the Yanshui bottle-washing group.



Members of the Yanshui bottle-washing team. From left: Weng Bi-yue, Wu Bi-li, Su Xiu-xiang, Li Zhao Xiu-ce, Huang Bao-xiu, and Huang A-bi.





### Six women, one rhythm

It was not yet seven in the morning when I arrived at the station, but the crisp, rhythmic clinking of glass could already be heard echoing through the air. The women were working in full swing, their hands moving with practiced efficiency. This dedicated crew—Su Xiu-xiang, Huang Bao-xiu (黃寶秀), Huang A-bi (黃阿碧), Weng Bi-yue (翁碧月), Wu Bi-li (吳碧利), and Li Zhao Xiu-ce (李趙秀策)—forms the core of the bottle-washing team.

Nearly all of them are in their 70s. At 68, Su Xiu-xiang is the “youngster” of the group and has naturally taken on the heavier labor. Whenever a batch of glass bottles arrives, she separates them into mesh bags and submerges them in large recycled bathtubs to soak overnight, softening the paper labels and adhesive for easier scrubbing.

The team’s swift movements and clear division of labor reveal an unspoken coordination. It is no surprise: They have been washing bottles together for a full five years. Even more striking is the atmosphere. Despite the constant clatter of glass and the relentless pace of their work, the air is light, filled with lively chatter and laughter. They even joked about their shared circumstances: “We’re just a bunch of seniors living alone whose husbands have all passed on. As soon as we wake up, we want to come to the recycling station. We have each other for company here, and there’s never a dull moment.”

Their words brought to mind Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s teaching that recycling stations can serve as excellent senior care centers. The elders before me were living proof of it.

### **The finer points of bottle washing**

As I learned more about their process, I realized that the glass bottles in their hands had already been carefully screened. They must be uniform in size and free of any cracks or chips. Once cleaned, the bottles are purchased by factories for further processing and used as containers for paint thinner.

Before washing begins, the aluminum caps must first be removed and sorted. The most labor-intensive part is usually removing the labels. With luck, a label comes off in one piece. If the adhesive proves stubborn, the volunteers carefully scrape it away bit by bit with kitchen knives, finishing with a steel scourer to remove any remaining traces of glue.

The insides of the bottles pose their own challenges, as they are often stuffed with cigarette butts or other debris. After clearing these out, the women reach for their secret weapon—long bottle cleaners fashioned from recycled wire hangers, with small pieces of scouring pads fastened to the ends. Only after a thorough internal scrubbing, a final rinse, and a period of air-drying is the process complete.

For the team, this work has become routine, likely even second nature. But to an outsider like me, their patience and persistence are genuinely admirable. Thanks to their dedication, the large volume of glass collected at the recycling station can continue on to serve new purposes.





### **The man who started it all**

Partway through my visit, Su Xiu-xiang introduced me to a man nearby who was deeply focused on dismantling appliances. It was then that I learned he, Yang Jia-xiong (楊嘉雄), was the founder of the bottle-washing team.

Yang had previously run a business related to bottled products, and so is intimately familiar with the specifications of different glass containers. When he joined Tzu Chi's recycling work in 1996, he discovered that a large number of recycled glass bottles had accumulated at the recycling station, with no buyers willing to take them. Not wanting to see them go to waste, he began searching for a solution.

He realized that the 300-milliliter bottles commonly used for spirits were the same size as the containers used by paint factories for solvents such as turpentine, lacquer thinner, and toluene. With this insight, he began visiting factories one by one to see if they would be willing to purchase recycled bottles. Some agreed, and for the next 20-plus years, he personally washed the bottles and delivered them himself.

Now 85 and coping with health problems, Yang can no longer manage such heavy physical work. Therefore, he's especially grateful to the volunteers who make up today's bottle-washing team. They took over his responsibilities five years ago under his personal guidance. I was deeply moved watching them in action; this was more than just recycling—it was a living legacy, a passing of the torch, and a continuation of one man's lifelong mission to cherish the Earth. ☸



# Khoo Chin Neo

## Everyone's Godmother

By Low Siew Lian and Yen Yu Chu

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Khoo Chin Neo's life showed that even the smallest kindness can brighten the world. A woman whose love extended to all, she will forever be the cherished "godmother" of her fellow volunteers.*



PHOTO BY YONG SIEW LEE

In 1995, 63-year-old Khoo Chin Neo (邱金娘), who lived in Melaka, Malaysia, first learned that recyclables could be turned into charitable funds to help those in need. From that day on, she began combing roadside trash cans, tirelessly searching for anything that could be recycled to aid others. What many saw as worthless refuse—items like aluminum cans and glass bottles—became symbols of hope in her hands. When she encountered curious looks or whispered remarks, she would simply smile and say, “Once these are sorted and sold, they can help many people who are suffering.”

In the years that followed, her steadfast figure was often seen riding in trucks to collect recyclables. Fellow volunteers frequently reminded her not to lift heavy items. She would agree, yet moments later would disappear again, joyfully immersed in her work. Though her family worried about her age and the strain of climbing in and out of trucks, she would gently reassure them: “Compared to the families I meet during home visits, I am truly blessed.”

She was always there for families in need, no matter how long or arduous the journeys were to reach them. While other volunteers helped children with their schoolwork, she sat with the mothers, sharing practical advice on managing their homes and on how to encourage their children to take part in daily chores. Having endured hardship and poverty herself, she understood what those in need were going through and was always ready to offer support.

She was equally dedicated to fundraising, recruiting over 800 donating members for Tzu Chi. (A donating member makes monthly contributions to the foundation.) Being illiterate, she relied on simple drawings to remember each donor: a leaf, a flower, or a road. When transportation was unavailable, she walked door to door to collect donations, rain or shine. She never hurried away after receiving a donation, but always stayed to chat and listen if donors wished to talk. Like a loving mother, she offered companionship, understanding, and care, earning the love and trust of everyone she met. People often held her back just to talk a little longer.

As the years passed, her steps slowed and

knee pain set in. She just strapped on braces and pressed on. “I want to help Master Cheng Yen gather more love,” she said. “Kindness must go on. Even small donations, when combined, can help many lives.”

She was a gentle yet grounded presence for nearly 30 years with Tzu Chi. Volunteers affectionately called her “Kai Ma” (“godmother” in Cantonese), their hearts captured by her warm smile and words that soothed the soul. In December 2022, she suffered a stroke and became bedridden. Though she could no longer speak, whenever she heard the words “Tzu Chi,” her eyes would light up, and she would respond with small movements. Tzu Chi was her deepest attachment—the love she could never let go of.

She passed away peacefully on November 25, 2025, at the age of 93. Though she is gone, the warmth, inspiration, and example she left behind live on in the hearts of many.

### **A heart that knew no obstacles**

Volunteer Chong Ah Kau (張佛生) recalled the years he spent working alongside “Kai Ma.” They would set out on home visits at nine in the morning and often didn’t return until four or five in the afternoon—and sometimes even later—but she never once complained of being tired. “Seeing a struggling family receive supplies and break into smiles was enough to make her happy,” Chong said. “If she knew a family had children, she would bring along sweets, and if the journey was long, she prepared snacks for everyone.”

Chong noted that Khoo never let difficulties stand in her way. Transportation, language barriers, illiteracy, age, or physical frailty—everything others might see as a hurdle, she found a way to overcome.

Perhaps most admirable was something she often said: “Be sure to call me whenever there’s an event. I’m not afraid of hard work; I’m only afraid of being left out. I will keep volunteering as long as I am able.” She was a constant fixture on monthly recycling days, regardless of how busy or tired she might be. “I love recycling work,” she would say. “It’s okay for the body to be tired, as long as the spirit isn’t.” She also liked to say, “The more we give, the more we gain. We



**Khoo Chin Neo interacts warmly with attendees of Indian descent at a year-end distribution event held by Tzu Chi Melaka in 2018 (left).** LEE KIN CHEE

**Khoo collects recyclables from a shop in 2007. She loved doing recycling work and used to say that it's okay for the body to be tired, as long as the spirit isn't.** YAN LIN-ZHAO

should keep sowing blessings and not let our store of blessings run dry."

Volunteer Lee Soo Leng (李士能) often drove Khoo around in a truck to collect recyclables from stores and homes. "Whenever we got out of the truck, she got out too," Lee recalled. "While we handled the recyclables, she would strike up conversations with people nearby. By the time we finished loading the truck, which was about 15 minutes later, she had already inspired one or more people to become donors."

Lee added with a smile, "If I were one of the people she approached, I'd have donated too." He explained that talking with her felt less like a solicitation and more like a warm chat with a caring elder. Even those meeting her for the first time felt instantly at ease and were often moved to contribute, whether to help children from underprivileged families continue their education or to support other worthy causes.

Lim Buay Eng (林梅英), who lived in the same neighborhood as Khoo, recalled the first time they met more than 20 years ago, when Khoo went to her home to collect a donation. Lim was taken aback when she saw her. "How could someone so elderly still be doing this?" she wondered, yet at the same time Khoo's spirit and perseverance left a deep impression on her. In time, Lim herself became a Tzu Chi volunteer, and the two later served together as Tzu Chi moms for members of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association. Khoo often prepared food for the students or invited them to her home, always saying, "These

children have come from other places to study; we must take good care of them."

During Lunar New Year, Tzu Chi volunteers would visit Khoo to pay their respects. As she handed out red envelopes, she made sure to give one to Lim, then already in her 50s, conveying her warmest wishes. "She was the 'Kai Ma' and grandmother to all of us," Lim said. "She loved not just her own family, but everyone."

Khoo was known for standing at the front when Tzu Chi took to the streets for fundraising, bowing politely to every passerby. While other volunteers sometimes hesitated to approach people from other ethnic groups, Khoo stepped forward with confidence. Using just a few simple phrases in Malay, she inspired generosity from others. On a single outing, she could easily sell more than 20 charity sale booklets, many to people from non-Chinese backgrounds.

"We were the ones making it complicated," Lim reflected. "She moved straight forward because she was so pure in heart, believing that everyone has love and compassion inside them. Everyone was moved by her kind simplicity and sincerity."

### **A legacy of love**

At Khoo's memorial service on November 27, 2025, her family shared a video to bid farewell to their beloved mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother. With deep affection, they spoke of how she had been the strongest pillar of the family and had passed on to them a spirit of goodness and faith. They vowed to carry on her legacy, continuing to do good together as a family and to spread love. The family also expressed gratitude to Tzu Chi, recognizing that the foundation had given Khoo an opportunity to dedicate herself selflessly to others.



Her daughter-in-law, Paruadi Ramasamy, went on stage during the memorial service to share how her mother-in-law's kindness, care, and compassion had touched many people. "We do not feel grief over her passing; instead, we find comfort in knowing she lived a full and beautiful life imbued with an all-embracing love," she said. "She always did what she believed was right. Through Tzu Chi, her love reached the world. Her wisdom is deeply imprinted in our hearts, serving as an example to us all."

Khoo's eldest son, Lim Jen Tat (林猷達), also spoke at the service. He shared that the love their mother had given them surpassed everything. Though she had left them, they would honor her memory by living out her generous spirit.

"Today's memorial is filled with warmth," he said. "What we see is not just my mother or our family's love, but a mother to everyone—a symbol of Great Love. For this, we are deeply grateful to Tzu Chi."

Khoo lived simply, asking for nothing for herself and wishing only to help more people. Her love was simple yet profound, reflected in her belief that being able to move, work, and help others is the greatest blessing of all. Through her life, she showed that even the smallest acts of goodness can brighten the world. Though a person may grow old and pass away, kindness and love never fade. May her joy and legacy be passed on from generation to generation, as those she touched go on to touch many others. ❀

# The Perfect Days of a Good Man

By Chiu Chuan Peinn

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*“A good man” is often just a phrase, but Xu Wu-song embodies it every day, giving the term real meaning. Once lost to gambling, he now finds fulfillment in reading, reflection, and volunteer service.*

The compliment of being “a good person” seems to have lost its impact in an era marked by social distance and growing indifference. The term has become a vague, polite label—and sometimes even carries negative connotations, suggesting someone who is “too nice” or “easy to take advantage of.”

But in the case of Xu Wu-song (許武嵩), the term carries real weight. In 2007, at age 50, he received his Tzu Chi volunteer certification. He was later selected as a “Community Role Model,” and during Tzu Chi’s year-end blessing ceremonies in several major cities across Taiwan, he took the stage to share the candid and inspiring story of his life’s transformation.

Xu speaks openly and sincerely on stage and off, his voice strong and resonant. The warmth in his words, coupled with his willingness to reveal his own vulnerabilities, makes him easy to connect with.

“Brother Xu is responsible and incredibly easy to work with,” said a fellow volunteer who has worked alongside him in recycling for many years. Though naturally fast-paced, he rarely loses his cool and always considers the best way to communicate whenever an issue arises. Even people outside Tzu Chi—security guards, cleaners, and visiting guests—consistently describe him as a “good person.” But what, exactly, makes him so “good”?

## From gambling to growth

Before Xu Wu-song became involved with Tzu Chi, his life went through a turbulent period.

In 1982, at age 25, he began selling clothing on Taipei’s “Shoe Street,” in what is now Zhongzheng District. He recalls those days as a golden age for business; inventory moved fast, and his net earnings on a good day could exceed 10,000 New Taiwan dollars (approximately US\$330).

At 35, he began investing in the stock market, often moving sums of ten million NT dollars or more. When those investments soured, he turned to gambling, risking equally staggering amounts—sometimes starting at a million NT dollars at a time. To fund his bets, he mortgaged his home, causing his wife, Huang Bi-hua (黃碧華), to leave him twice. He tapped into his parents’ life savings too, breaking their hearts in the process.

Once, after a winning streak, Xu left a stack of cash on the table for household expenses. Taking it as a sign of change, his wife believed that the worst was finally behind them—until the next morning, when she discovered the money was gone. For ten years, Xu teetered between gambling and quitting, unable to fully pull himself free.



But, as the saying goes, even in the darkest times there can be a spark of hope. He identifies the turning point in his life as the moment his wife enrolled their youngest son in Forest School, an alternative grade school operated by the Humanistic Education Foundation. The school required parents to participate in a parental growth program—a form of adult re-education that included a book club. There, Xu found himself sitting alongside professors, engineers, and street vendors, reading and discussing books on psychology, philosophy, education, and Buddhist teachings.

Over the six years their son attended the school, Xu developed a love of reading. He came

**Xu Wu-song has arrived punctually every week for the past six years to collect recyclables from this mixed-use office building on Fuxing North Road in Taipei. His steadiness and reliability have earned him the trust of security guards and caretakers.**

to realize that even though he had long left formal schooling, he was still capable of learning and growth. “I had been a poor student,” he said, “but given a chance to start over, I could become someone eager to learn—someone who could, in turn, bring energy, enthusiasm, and positivity to those around me.”



**Every week, Xu drives a truck on his own and collects recyclables from shops and buildings in Taipei.**

Reflecting on this, he said, “Everyone in the parental growth class and book club knew me and could see that I wasn’t a bad person at heart. So why did I lose my way chasing money?” Reading *The Art of Loving* by renowned psychologist Erich Fromm helped him understand that his pursuit of wealth had been an attempt to fill an inner emptiness rooted in a narrow, self-centered view of love.

When Xu was a child, his parents were often too busy to provide the guidance he needed. In his teachers’ eyes, he was a troublemaker who liked to play pranks on classmates. One teacher even told him, “Coming from a poor family and always causing trouble, a kid like you will never

amount to anything.”

Comparing his son’s upbringing with his own, Xu came to see the difference a nurturing, well-guided environment can make. He grew to deeply appreciate the power of good education and felt grateful to have developed a habit of reading—something largely absent from his life after he entered the working world. The wisdom he found in books offered new insight into himself and life’s deeper meaning, giving him the clarity and resolve to live differently. He learned that true love is expansive and active, and that only those who learn to respect and care for themselves can genuinely love others.

### **Steady service**

What he learned from years of reading and reflection now finds expression in the dedication and care he brings to his volunteer work.

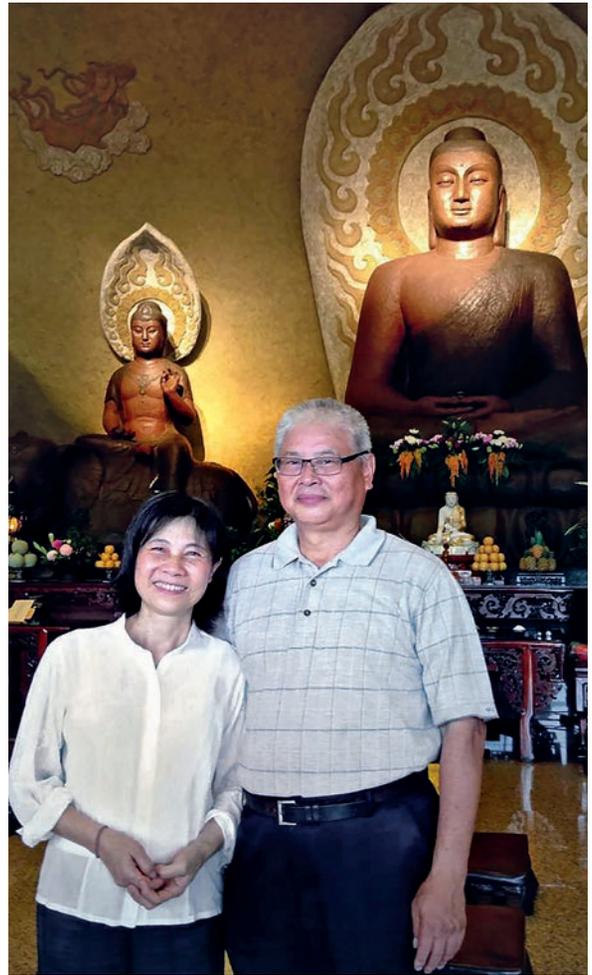
Each day, four or five small trucks set out from Tzu Chi's Zhongshan Bade Recycling Station in Taipei, weaving through the city's concrete-and-steel landscape to collect what urban life discards. On Fuxing North Road stands a mixed-use office building that houses a hotel. The hotel is one of the sites Xu has visited for more than a decade to pick up recyclables.

Six years ago, when security guard Chen Zheng-long (陳正龍) first took up his post at the building, he was met with an ongoing problem: Tenants on other floors were troubled by the buildup of recyclables caused by irregular collection by commercial operators. Seeking a solution, Chen reached out to Xu and proposed that while he was picking up recycling at the hotel, he might as well handle all the building's recycling, with all proceeds donated to Tzu Chi. To make the system work, Chen asked residents, banks, and offices in the building to carry out basic sorting in advance. "They all say I'm very strict," Chen admitted with a laugh.

Xu has been a model of punctuality since this cooperation began. Sometimes, the recyclables are cleared before Chen even starts his shift. "If he's heading to Hualien to volunteer for Tzu Chi there, he always calls ahead to give me a heads-up," Chen noted.

Volunteers from the Zhongshan Bade Recycling Station routinely collect recyclables from government offices, hotels, shops, office buildings, and residential complexes. As long as a building or business is willing to do basic sorting in advance, long-term cooperation is possible. Even if a building or shop chooses to keep part of its recyclables for private sale or give them to scavengers, this does not affect its partnership with Tzu Chi. As Xu put it, "What matters most is promoting environmental awareness and not wasting reusable resources." He has been a central part of this effort.

Yu Xing-jia (余幸佳), a caretaker at a building near Minsheng East Road, has known Xu for ten years. She is responsible for receiving mail, handling trash, and sorting recyclables. In a small partitioned area on the first floor, several large industrial sacks sit, filled with plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, and other recyclables.



**Having weathered the storms of life together, Xu and his wife, Huang Bi-hua, now walk the Tzu Chi Path side by side, supporting each other in both daily life and volunteer work.** COURTESY OF XU WU-SONG

Each day, Yu makes two trips with a cart to take out the general trash. She can't imagine how many additional trips would be required if she also had to handle the recyclables herself. "I'm truly grateful to Brother Xu for his help," she said. "The volume of recycling is really large now." Even before Yu started working there, Xu had already been coming with a team to collect recyclables. "Now, it's just Brother Xu coming on his own," she added. Because the basements of residential and office buildings do not allow easy access by outside vehicles, Xu often carries out collections single-handedly.



**A devoted reader, Xu often studies Buddhist scriptures and Master Cheng Yen's teachings as part of his daily routine.**

COURTESY OF XU WU-SONG

Over many years of working with building security guards and caretakers, Xu has consistently maintained a courteous, respectful distance. In this big city, he and those he works with are closely connected through their shared commitment to environmental protection, yet they never intrude into one another's private lives. Their relationships are restrained and understated, built on mutual respect. Xu's steadiness and trustworthiness serve as an important anchor for these connections.

### **Perfect days**

The life Xu leads today may seem ordinary at first glance, but it is anything but. He aspires to a rhythm of living akin to monastic life. He rises at four each morning, believing that the transition between night and day—the brief moment when the sun and the moon share the sky—is the most spiritually potent time. Most days, he participates online in the morning service at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, chanting sutras alongside resident monastics and listening to Master Cheng Yen's teachings. Only after this devotional ritual does he feel the day truly begin.

Afterward, he has a simple, wholesome break-

fast: pumpkin soy milk, a multigrain steamed bun, fruit, and a hard-boiled egg lightly seasoned with salt. By seven o'clock, he is on his way to the recycling station, ready for the day's work. His wife sometimes accompanies him, but since she has recently taken on the care of elderly people living alone, he usually goes by himself.

Packing, loading, and transporting recyclables to recycling plants for sale make up the routine he shares with other volunteers. Despite his solid build and broad, sturdy hands, he faces the same physical challenges as everyone else. During his work, he bends repeatedly to lift cardboard boxes packed with recyclables—motions he performs over a hundred times a day. Working like this inevitably chaps his hands and weakens his grip, and the constant bending and straightening leaves his lower back aching. Yet he seems to take these challenges in stride, finding fulfillment in doing the Earth a good turn.

He now helps care for his grandson, so he returns home at noon to cook lunch. Evenings after seven are reserved for himself, usually spent reading or taking a walk. The steady, regular rhythm of his days calls to mind the Japanese film *Perfect Days*. In the film, a public toilet cleaner carries out the daily toil of cleaning toilets, yet lives with grace, nourished by music, photography, reading, and a soak in a public bath. Xu may be even more fortunate than the film's protagonist: He has a loving family and a large, close-knit community at the recycling station.

Reflecting on his work and daily practice, Xu views environmental pollution as a form of collective karma, and recycling as a form of individual cultivation. Recycling transforms what is dirty and discarded into something clean and useful—an act he sees as a metaphor for spiritual practice itself, clearing mental impurities to cultivate mindfulness and inner clarity. "I recycle every day, listen to the Master's teachings every day, and reflect on myself every day," he said. "Daily reflection brings me joy, revealing the innate purity I have always carried within."

Focusing on living each day well—doing your best with the task at hand, being kind to yourself, and showing the same kindness to others—could well be a fair definition of a good person today. ❀

# Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

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**Melbourne**  
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**Perth**  
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Fax: 27-36-6341261

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Fax: 1-562-9261603

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Fax: 1-630-9609360

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Fax: 1-972-6807732

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## Kansas

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## Las Vegas

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## Long Island

Tel: 1-516-8736888  
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## Los Angeles Northwest

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## Los Angeles West

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Fax: 1-310-4779518

## Madison

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## Miami

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## New Jersey

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## Oakland

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*Remove the word “difficulty” from your life’s dictionary.  
When challenges arise, meet them with steady confidence  
and strive to overcome them.—Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA