

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Choosing Wellness

Improving Your Health With a Whole-Plant Diet



Working for the Common Good of the World

Translated by Teresa Chang



A jeepney driver poses with food distributed by Tzu Chi. Jeepney and pedicab drivers in the Philippines are among those most affected by the pandemic. The foundation has reached out to this group of people by providing them with rice and other food items.

JAMAICA DIGO

The COVID-19 pandemic started more than a year ago. Many countries have experienced lockdowns, which have in turn taken an economic toll on countless people. Tzu Chi has responded by giving aid to the vulnerable. In the Philippines, for example, our volunteers have extended a helping hand to jeepney and pedicab drivers. They've been among those most affected by the pandemic. Many drivers, grateful for our help, pasted stickers on their vehicles to help us promote vegetarianism. They also took Tzu Chi coin banks home to save money to help other needy people.

A profound sense of gratitude rose in my heart when I learned what the drivers had done. I'm thankful to them for spreading messages of goodness and giving what they can. They may not be materially rich, but their hearts are rich with love. They reminded me of how Tzu Chi started 55 years ago—how 30 housewives, each saving a little money in a bamboo coin bank every day to aid the needy, helped launch our foundation. We built our foundation from scratch, and today we have volunteers in over 60 countries and areas serving the needy. Without these living bodhisattvas, Tzu Chi wouldn't have been able to reach so many people over the years.

Living in this day and age, we have technology right at our fingertips to help us see what is happening around the world. People in rich countries live in abundance. In fact, they live in such abundance that they throw away perfectly edible food and serviceable goods in large quantities. In sharp contrast, people in poor countries don't even have enough to eat. Food insecurity is an issue they wrestle with day to day.

Even though most of us have technology at our fingertips to see the world, few see the large number of people around the globe struggling to feed themselves day in and day out—or they choose to look away, as though it isn't any of their concern. Out of the nearly eight billion people in the world, more than 800 million suffer from chronic hunger. What can we do to help? It would only take ten of us eating a little less to save enough to feed one hungry person.

Eating a little less and refraining from wasting food is not difficult for most people, but the benefits are huge. Most of all, it can help prevent people from starving. Don't underestimate yourself and think that helping the needy is the exclusive province of the rich. Anyone willing to give can help and contribute. Everyone can do good. If we all contribute what we can, our combined strength will make a huge difference.

Impermanence strikes all the time. The pandemic is just one instance. Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, for example. We have seen countless instances of mudslides swallowing lives and homes in the blink of an eye, and of unstoppable forest fires wreaking havoc. Our planet has a large population. To satisfy the needs and wants of this large population, we have caused a lot of damage to the ecosystem. We have done much that is bad for the Earth—much of it purely for the sake of our enjoyment. And yet how long can such enjoyment last? Many people have everything, but they are not content and happy—they still feel lacking and want more.

Every day I keep an eye on what is happening around the world. What I see weighs me down and makes me feel worried and anxious. It's hard to describe my feelings. These days, with my physical condition, I often have to exert a lot of force just to speak. Yet, even so, I tell myself I must continue giving all I can. I work with the sincerest wish to inspire the pure, undefiled love in everyone's heart. I work with the sincerest wish to inspire everyone to walk together on the Path of the Bodhisattvas.

Time flies by so quickly. There is no way we can stop it. The only way we can counter the passage of time is to do our best to cultivate ourselves and benefit others. Tap into your inner wellspring of love. Light a lamp for others to brighten their path; give a glass of water or a handful of rice to those in need. When we contribute to the common good of the world, when we help others live in peace, we create a meaningful chapter in our lives. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

November 2021



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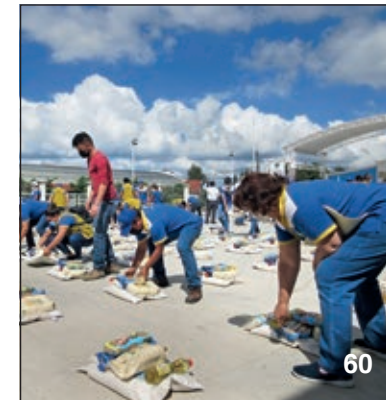
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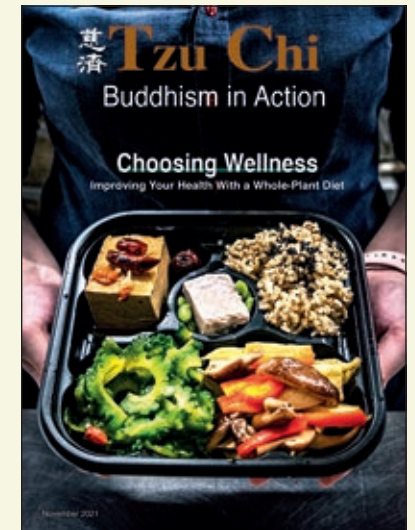
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right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

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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
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中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

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Choosing Wellness

Improving Your Health
With a Whole-Plant Diet

Wanting to be healthier, they signed up for a 21-day whole-plant diet program. Their menus featured a lot of whole grains, protein, vegetables, and fruit, but very little oil, salt, or sugar. The diet took some getting used to, but worked in a big way!



Make Health a Habit

By Liao Zhe-min

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

It isn't just about getting used to a whole-food, plant-based diet. Participants also need to overcome their desire for heavily seasoned food, drink plenty of water, avoid sugary beverages, and exercise more. For the sake of their wellness, they are willing to go for it.

Mrs. Lin is an office worker. She loves bread and fried food. Her cholesterol has been on the high side for a long time. Her family tells her not to worry about it too much—that it is hereditary—but she is of a different mind. “I don’t want to take medication on a long-term basis, but I want to be healthier. There are still many things I want to do.” Mrs. Kao is a breast cancer survivor with gastrointestinal issues. Her triglycerides are often too high too, so she needs to stay on meds to manage her conditions. Mr. Shen, 60, works in construction. He often had social dinners with his clients throughout his career, smoking and drinking and eating rich food. His triglycerides are staggeringly high.

They all want to be healthier. That’s why they accepted the invitation of Tzu Chi volunteers in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, and enrolled in a 21-day health challenge. The challenge was to maintain a whole-plant diet low in oil, salt, and sugar. They also were encouraged to avoid refined processed food, eggs, and milk. The goal of the challenge was to boost their health by having them eat healthier, tame their desire for heavily seasoned food, drink plenty of water, and exercise more.

The palates of most program participants were unaccustomed to such a diet when they started. The food was a lot milder than what they had been used to. But after just a week, they were amazed by the changes they had noticed in themselves: “It has become easier for me to fall asleep at night”; “I don’t get tired so easily now”; and “My endurance and energy have improved.” These positive, uplifting changes were like a shot

in the arm and empowered them to finish the program.

Numbers can talk

At the end of the 21 days, many participants saw their health numbers markedly improve or settle back within the normal ranges. For example, Ms. Lin’s low-density lipoprotein cholesterol—the so-called “bad” cholesterol—dropped from 188 to 117 mg/dl. She was so happy she signed up for another round of the program. She also inquired whether the program provided food ingredients packages or recipes with which she could maintain a whole-plant diet until the next 21-day challenge began.

Mr. Shen was also pleasantly surprised with his results. He had been a meat eater before the program, and had very high blood fat levels. Though he had long been taking medicine to manage his health conditions, his physician, Dr. Chen Deng-wang (陳登旺), a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), suggested that he join the health challenge program. When Shen saw the results of his blood tests after the 21-day challenge, he could hardly believe his eyes and exclaimed: “How is this possible?!” His triglyceride levels had plummeted from 1,800 to an unprecedented 740. Those record numbers prompted him to sign up for a second round of the program in no time.

Zhuang Zhang-quan (莊章銓), another participant, is a medical technician who helped perform the blood tests for program participants. Like the others, he was amazed by the benefits of the health challenge. He is nearly 60. Before the challenge, he tended to get short of breath when he



crouched down, he was having more and more gray hair, and age spots were cropping up on his skin. After he joined the program, however, he noticed a decrease in his white hair and an increase in his black hair, his age spots became paler, and his fingernails became smoother and shinier. He also lost three kilograms (6.6 pounds). “Over these 21 days,” he said, “I’ve felt very energetic, and my stomach and intestines have been in great working order. Every inch of my skin, from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, has felt a marked difference.”

He added that when his family noticed he was avoiding processed and heavily seasoned food, they followed his example and began eating more healthy too. His wife lost two kilograms as a result, and their children’s health even improved slightly.

Positive feedback from participants greatly encouraged the volunteer team that launched the program. It energized them to continue to carry out the program, in partnership with restaurants, TIMA doctors, and dietitians. Their frequent interactions with participants gave them useful information on how everyone liked the meals and what changes participants were noticing in themselves. Like the participants, they were not disappointed in the results.

Participants in the 21-day health challenge program arrive every day at noon and in the early evening at a designated venue to fetch their boxed meals.

How it started

According to statistics released by Taiwan’s Ministry of Health and Welfare, chronic illnesses made up over half of the top ten leading causes of death in Taiwan in 2020. Such illnesses include cardiovascular diseases, cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes, and hypertension. Sufferers of chronic illness are also more likely to get very sick with COVID-19. Unhealthy diets are a major risk factor that has been proven to contribute to these chronic diseases.

In June this year, Ou Yu-jing (歐于菁), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Kaohsiung, learned about a project organized by her counterparts in Malaysia: the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge. The goal of the Malaysian project was to help people improve their health through a whole-food, plant-based diet. After seeing the “before and after” health numbers of participants, one veteran doctor in Malaysia with 20 years of experience said that she had never seen so much improvement, in so many people, in such a short time.

Ou was impressed with the results in Malaysia and decided to start the same program in Taiwan. She organized a team which was further split into groups in charge of food quality control, administrative work, medical affairs, coordination, etc. She launched the program in Taiwan in late June 2021.

As its name suggests, each round of the challenge lasts 21 days. Participants are provided boxed meals for lunch and dinner, Monday through Friday, over the course of three weeks. Before the first 21-day round kicked off, Ou and Cai Ya-chun (蔡雅純), another Tzu Chi volunteer, conferred with dietitians and the chefs from three restaurants on the production of the boxed meals. Aside from ascertaining that the proportion of nutrients met the criteria, they also sampled the dishes and discussed the ingredients and flavors.

Allowing no artificial condiments in such a diet posed quite a challenge to the participating chefs. Ou was moved to see how the chefs would help each other out every time one of them

encountered a problem. "I saw in our group chat that every time a chef raised a question, another would try to provide a solution." Many difficulties and challenges were overcome this way.

The program's whole-plant diet is made up of four food groups: whole grains, proteins, vegetables, and fruit. Each food group comprises a quarter of the diet, but the amount of vegetables is allowed to exceed that of fruit. Program dietician Huang Mei-hua (黃美樺) said that their team was originally very strict with everything. For example, she said, "We used a scale to measure the weight of each dish so we could decide whether the proportion of nutrients met our requirements." However, because the number of boxed

Tzu Chi volunteers in Kaohsiung who help organize the program meet with a dietician before a new round of the health challenge to sample the food to be provided by the program.





meals the program had to provide every day was large, measuring the weight of each dish was too much work, so in the end they decided to go by bulk instead of weight. Ou said that because fruit does not keep well in hot weather, the fruit in the program is prepared by the participants themselves.

The program only provided lunch and dinner, but what about breakfast? Program volunteer Wang Jin (王瑾) explained that their team sent out recipes designed by dietitians early every morning to each participant to give them some breakfast ideas. Participants were also encouraged to share with others in the program what they had for breakfast so that everyone could learn from each other. On the weekends, when no meals were provided, participants could refer to cooking videos recorded by volunteers to prepare their own meals. Participating restaurants also provided ready-to-heat packaged meals or food ingredients packages for participants so that they wouldn't be at a loss for what to eat on the weekends.

The program emphasizes the importance of exercise too. To help participants shape up, volunteers invited Zeng Ying-jia (曾英嘉), who once taught physical education in high school, to instruct participants online how to stretch their bodies and strengthen their core muscles. "I've followed the instructor's workout demonstrations several times," said volunteer Cai Ya-chun, "and after just a few minutes I began to sweat."

A chef prepares food for the program.

Volunteer Wang Jin also sent out electronic picture cards every morning, midday, and evening to cheer participants on and to share nutritional and medical information. Examples of the messages on the cards included: "When it comes to replacing processed snacks with natural foods, bananas, apples, sweet potatoes, and edamame beans are all good choices. They are good at curbing your hunger" and "Be sure to drink plenty of water every day."

When participants showed up at noon and in the early evening to fetch their meals, volunteer Chen Chun-xing (陳春杏), who helped extend care to participants, asked them questions such as, "How do you like the meals?" and "Have you noticed any changes in your body?" One participant said that he had lost one kilogram (2.2 pounds) in just two weeks. Another said, "I don't feel sleepy or tired even after I have my meals. I'm full of energy to keep working." Sometimes Chen teased participants by asking, "Do you miss cookies, white bread, or instant noodles?" Some participants answered: "You bet! But I'll stay the course for the sake of my health."

It's not hard to change

An exchange session was held online every Sunday afternoon during which program partici-

Volunteers Cai Ya-chun and Lin Wei-yang (林維揚) share with program participants via video how to prepare breakfasts with natural food ingredients and without using artificial condiments.





pants, dieticians, and doctors met. During such sessions, dieticians shared knowledge and information on subjects such as how to understand food ingredients and nutritional labels, and participants could raise any questions or concerns they had about the whole-plant diet. Many participants were used to a meat diet, so it was inevitable they were a little unaccustomed to the new diet when they first joined the program. Some, for example, said that they had noticed abdominal bloating or increased flatulence caused by eating more legumes than they had been used to. Dr. Qiu Sheng-cong (邱聖聰), a TIMA doctor, suggested that participants chew their food more finely. This would help the enzymes in their saliva work better on the food and enable their stomachs and intestines to gradually adjust to the new plant fibers, helping improve such issues.

Other participants asked how to replenish suitable nutrients after exercise. Dr. Qiu answered that a whole-plant diet would not result in a deficiency of electrolytes or minerals, but suggested using natural sea salt to replenish the electrolytes lost through sweat. One can dissolve a teaspoon of natural sea salt in every 500 milliliters of drinking water. He didn't recommend commercial

Volunteers, chefs from participating restaurants, and a dietician pose before the food they are sampling. Positive feedback from program participants has greatly encouraged the team that launched the program.

sports drinks because they don't qualify as natural food.

Dr. Xie Ming-yu (謝明裕), who specializes in liver and gallbladder conditions, reminded program participants with a penchant for sweets, sugary drinks, and fruit: "We die without salt, but we won't without sugar." He also pointed out that many deep-fried or processed foodstuffs contain man-made fats, which can cause addiction, place extra burdens on the body, and even lead to fatty liver. He encouraged everyone to eat seasonal, locally grown vegetables. He pointed out that they have natural good flavors and do not require excess seasoning. He also encouraged everyone to opt for whole wheat bread, which when chewed finely allows the food's natural good flavors to come through.

Change is not as difficult as one might think. "I believe that if we go for the right food, it will have



a huge impact on our body," said volunteer Cai Ya-chun.

By early October 2021, program volunteers had completed three rounds of health challenge, and their efforts are still on-going. They work with a mission to promote plant-based diets and help more people become healthier. In addition to Kaohsiung, the same diet challenge has been launched in Hualien, Hsinchu, and Chiayi, in eastern, northern, and southern Taiwan respectively.

"I believe no one dares say that they are 'very' healthy, and that they are not afraid of any illness," said Ou Yu-jing. She believes that if the diet promoted by the program proves good for health, everyone will be willing to give it a try.

Seeing an improvement in their health numbers is a joy for participants, but an even more precious thing is the development of a health-conscious mindset.

An example is Cai Jin-ying (蔡金英), a program participant with a chronic kidney condition. She said even though she had been a vegetarian for more than a decade, her fondness for heavily seasoned food had caused her to ingest too much oil, salt, and other condiments, resulting in

Participants are happy that their health numbers have improved as a result of the 21-day challenge.

undue burdens on her body and causing her health to suffer. But after participating in the program, her health numbers improved, she had more energy, no longer suffered from dizzy spells, and was even sleeping better. These benefits prompted her to change how she prepared her food. Her cooking methods are healthier now; instead of frying or deep-frying her food for example, she steams or boils it. She has also cut down on the use of oil, salt, and sugar. Changes to her cooking affect not only her health, but that of her family too.

The diet program has shown that achieving optimum health is within our control. After reading this article, you may want to pause and give a second thought the next time you are adding a second dash of salt in the food you are preparing or putting sugar in that steaming cup of tea before you. You have a say in your health. You can make your own choices. After all, good health is the most precious asset one can possess. With good health, all things are possible. ☘

Thinking and Cooking Outside the Box

Narrated by Ou Yu-jing

Interviewed and compiled by Liao Zhe-min

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Tzu Chi volunteers invited six plant-based restaurants to work with them to implement a whole-plant diet program. Half of the restaurants declined the opportunity after they were briefed on the requirements. The other three accepted the challenge, but it wasn't easy producing food that met the criteria.

In 2011, Tzu Chi put on a musical adaptation of the *Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance*, a Chinese Buddhist text. Volunteers taking part in the performances were required to observe a vegetarian diet for at least 108 days to help purify their hearts and bodies. The diet helped ensure they could present the adaptation with a most sincere and pure heart. I've been helping promote vegetarianism as a Tzu Chi volunteer ever since. For example, that year I provided vegetarian lunches for employees at my company for 108 days.

Early last year, my father was hospitalized for a serious illness. He stayed in the intensive care unit for more than a month. After he recovered and was discharged, he decided to hold vegetarian banquets for 20,000 people. Because of his extended hospitalization, he didn't realize that public gatherings had been forbidden due to the pandemic. I explained the situation to him and said that medical professionals and other front-line workers had been working hard since the epidemic broke out to help fight the disease. I suggested that instead of holding vegetarian banquets for 20,000 people, we provide 20,000 vegetarian boxed meals to medical professionals, police officers, firefighters, and government workers to thank them for their hard work. My father agreed.

That's how I began working with other volunteers to launch a vegetarian meal service. I asked dietitians to design menus for the project to

ensure that our meals were healthy, and I found 11 restaurants that were willing to work with us to prepare the meals. I developed good ties with many chefs as a result of this project. Other volunteers across Taiwan have organized similar meal services for front-line workers since COVID-19 started.

As I looked back on that project, however, I began to wonder whether our efforts to promote vegetarianism were effective. Were people actually switching to a vegetarian diet just because they ate a few boxed meals we sent out? That's why my interest was piqued when I learned in June this year about the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge launched by our volunteers in Malaysia.

I'm very willing to try new things. I once even took a week's leave from my job to take part in a camp that was designed to boost one's health via a diet plan. Volunteers who started the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge were also out to help people become healthier via a diet plan. But unlike the camp I attended, one could go about their daily routines as usual while keeping such a diet. A volunteer said to me that the health challenge looked like an upgraded version of our meal service. I agreed and decided that such a challenge shouldn't be too difficult to organize. Thus, I set to work.

Harder than imagined

A few days later, I invited people from six restaurants to meet online with me and with volunteers in Malaysia to learn more about the health



Ou Yu-jing, a Tzu Chi volunteer in Kaohsiung, helped launch the 21-day health challenge in Taiwan.

ipating chefs sharing tips with each other to develop dishes that met our criteria and that tasted good. For example, Hu Cai-bin (胡財賓), a Japanese food chef, once asked in our group chat: "How do you cook brown rice to make it taste better?" Dileepkumar Vasantryo, a chef of Indian cuisine, responded by phoning him and sharing some tips with him. Afterwards, Hu said that his brown rice had become tastier.

Another similar example left a deep impression on me. That time, Hu said, "Oh, no! Japanese cuisine emphasizes the use of sugar, but no [processed] sugar is allowed in our boxed meals. We have to use natural ingredients instead. What should I do?" Vasantryo immediately told him: "My mom taught me that if you cook onions longer, you bring out their sweet flavors. You don't need to add a single drop of water." A few days later, Vasantryo made a video demonstrating how he simmered his onions to bring out the natural sugar in them.

When he first joined our program, chef Hu often encountered challenges trying to prepare the

challenge. Much to my surprise, some chefs balked at joining when they learned about the restrictions they'd have to follow in preparing the meals. Such restrictions included: there could be no frying, deep-frying, or stir-frying, and only minuscule amounts of cooking oil, salt, and sugar were allowed. In addition, processed food was forbidden. One chef said immediately, "There is no way my restaurant can do this." Another said the next day, "What you are proposing sounds a lot like *kaiseki ryori* [a Japanese haute cuisine]. It's simply too difficult for us."

In the end, only three restaurants agreed to take on the challenge.

I was very grateful to those restaurants for coming on board. I was also moved to see partic-

type of food we wanted. Due to the program's prerequisites, he couldn't use many of the sauces and condiments he was accustomed to using as a Japanese food chef. He felt greatly constrained. One time I asked him if he could make some sushi for our program. He looked a little stumped and said that vinegar was needed to prepare the rice for sushi, but because most commercial vinegar has a high sugar content, it couldn't be used in our program. When other chefs learned about the difficulty Hu was experiencing, one of them told him in our group chat: "My mom told me you can use lemon to replace vinegar." I felt so lucky and so grateful to be able to work with a group of chefs who were so willing to share what they knew with each other, who weren't daunted



by challenges, and who were willing to try and learn new things.

More than just health benefits

When program participants came to fetch their meals, I asked them, “What do you think about the meals?” or “Has your body undergone any changes?” Some told me there was too much rice in their meal boxes and that they were unable to eat it all. I told them I had a small appetite too, and like them I could never finish the rice. Then I shared my solution with them: that I’d eat only half of the brown rice, and put the other half in the freezer. Then, the next day, I would cook the leftover rice with some cashews and Chinese dates. It was a delicious way to take care of the leftovers.

Despite the comments about there being too much rice in the boxes, every participant gave very positive feedback. One even told me, just two or three days after she joined the program, that she had become lighter and more nimble, and that her bowel movements had become easier. Another participant used to have to take sleeping pills to help her go to sleep, but after eating our meals she said that she was sleeping

Ou (middle) and her fellow volunteer Cai Ya-chun (right) often visit restaurants participating in the diet program to talk about the menus for the program and about preparing ready-to-heat packaged meals for participants.

very well now, without having to resort to medicine.

A restaurant owner joined the program too because he wanted to try the food prepared by the participating restaurants. Much to his surprise, he lost eight kilograms (18 pounds) after taking part in two rounds of the challenge. His face became leaner, and his figure improved quite a bit. I teased him about it, saying, “You’ve become quite a looker!”

I believe that the whole-plant diet we’re promoting might prove a better and more effective way of getting more people to eat vegetarian. Once people try such a diet and experience the improvement in their health and the many benefits that come with it, they’ll be more inclined to follow a plant-based diet long-term. When all is said and done, who doesn’t want to be healthier? ❀

What the Experts Say

By Zhang Yu-fan

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital and Tzu Chi volunteers in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, launched the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge in August 2021, inviting members of the public to try a whole-food, plant-based diet. This diet avoids the intake of meat, eggs, and milk. But can such a diet be nutritionally balanced? Dr. Zhang Huai-ren of the Department of Cardiology at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital and Dietician Su Zhen-ying weigh in on this and other important questions.

Q: Is the whole-food, plant-based diet promoted by the health challenge program too strict and therefore difficult to maintain?

A: Instead of focusing on how long the diet lasts, one’s focus should be on establishing good dietary habits that can last beyond the 21-day challenge.

The Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge originated from an online health promotion program launched in 2009 by America’s Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). Participants of the PCRM program had to eat according to a Power Plate created by the committee. The Power Plate consisted of four food groups: fruit, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, each making up a quarter of a meal.

Dr. Chang Huai-ren (張懷仁) of the Department of Cardiology at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital pointed out that many healthy dietary programs emphasize caloric intake, but the focus of the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge is on a whole-food, plant-based diet—it doesn’t fixate on counting calories. The diet itself happens to be high in fiber and low in calories, so counting calories isn’t necessary. As long as a participant doesn’t feel hungry from such a diet and makes sure that the four food groups each make up a quarter of their meals, the calories will take care of themselves. (It should be noted that the amount of vegetables is allowed to surpass that of the fruit in the challenge.)

This whole-plant diet stresses the use of little oil, salt, and sugar. Food preparation methods

that involve large amounts of oil, salt, and sugar, such as gratinéing, deep-frying, frying, and pickling, are to be avoided. Steaming, poaching, stewing, and roasting are the preferred cooking methods in the program.

Dietician Su Zhen-ying (蘇真瑩) explained that participants are not allowed to eat more than a tablespoon of oil per meal during the 21 days of the health challenge program, and that salt is limited to no more than six grams a day. Sugary beverages should be avoided and replaced with plenty of water. In fact, it’s recommended to consume at least 30 milliliters of water for every kilogram of weight. A person weighing 60 kilograms (132 pounds), for instance, needs at least 1.8 liters of water per day. If participants crave a beverage, they should opt for black coffee or tea without added sugar. Fruit juices are discouraged.

Why is every round of challenge set at 21 days? According to Dr. Chang, 21 days is the shortest amount of time to see any obvious changes in one’s health numbers. It’s also the minimal time required to create a new habit. It might be difficult or impossible to make a full switch to a whole-plant diet, so taking part in a program like the 21-day challenge is a good way for participants to decide whether a whole-plant lifestyle suits them or not.

To help participants better track the changes in themselves, their height, weight, and blood pressure are measured before and at the end of the 21-day round for comparison. Blood tests are also taken to see if there are any changes in their blood sugar and blood fat levels.

Q: What are the differences between a whole-plant diet and a conventional vegetarian diet?

A: A whole-food, plant-based diet consists primarily of natural and unrefined foods. Only minimally processed ingredients are allowed.

A whole-plant diet focuses primarily on eating whole foods: things that are as close to their natural state as possible. For example, whole fruit is recommended over fruit juice, sweet potatoes instead of sweet potato cake, and whole potatoes over French fries or hash browns. The fewer additives or chemicals a food contains, the better.

Though heavily processed foods with a high oil, salt, or sugar content are to be avoided, processed foods are not completely banned in the diet. It's just that such food shouldn't be so overly refined or processed that its nutrients and fibers are lost in the process. Based on this principle, brown rice, foxtail millet, quinoa, and oatmeal are recommended over refined rice or noodles.

Dietician Su pointed out that one hundred percent whole-wheat noodles or breads are allowed in the whole-plant diet because they are minimally processed and have all the nutrients present in the original whole food. Therefore, when choosing whole-grain food for their meals, partakers of the whole-plant diet are free to opt for brown rice noodles, whole-wheat pasta, whole-wheat bread, and whole-grain baguettes made from flour free of oil.



Dr. Chang Huai-ren of the Department of Cardiology at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital suggested that people interested in a whole-plant diet try the 21-day health challenge before deciding whether to turn the diet into a long-term habit.

COURTESY OF HUALIEN TZU CHI HOSPITAL

Dr. Chang added that when deciding on what food is permissible on a whole-plant diet, a key factor for consideration is how the food in question has been processed. Many foods cannot be eaten unless they are processed in some way, but even after being processed they still retain the nutrients in the original food. Examples include soybean milk, tofu, natto, low-salt miso, tempeh (an Indonesian food made from fermented soybeans), and uncolored or unbleached dried tofu.

Soybeans are one of the most important sources of protein in a whole-plant diet. According to Dietician Su, soybeans contain all eight essential amino acids, unlike other plant proteins, which usually lack at least one essential amino acid. The protein content of soybeans is comparable to that of meat-based protein.

However, raw soybeans contain trypsin inhibitors that interfere with protein digestion. As a result, soybeans can trigger flatulence or indigestion if eaten raw. Heat treatment during processing serves to inactivate the trypsin inhibitors. Consuming soybean products such as soybean milk, tofu pudding, or tofu can help prevent indigestion caused by eating raw soybeans.

Q: Since a whole-plant diet does not contain fish, meat, eggs, or dairy, is it nutritionally insufficient?

A: A whole-plant diet produces adequate nutrition for the human body, but it's recommended to supplement the diet with plant-based omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin B12.

Dietician Su said that to judge whether a diet is nutritionally balanced, one needs to look at the overall proportions of the six major nutrients in the diet. The six essential nutrients that the body needs to function properly include carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water. They are the building blocks for growth and repair and substances essential to regulate chemical processes in the body.

The dietician stressed that even though a whole-plant diet contains no dairy or meat, it can still meet the body's nutritional requirements. Both the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in the United States and the British Dietetic Association have pointed out that a properly planned and executed whole-plant diet can satisfy the health needs of people of all ages.

Even so, Dr. Chang reminded people on a whole-plant diet to pay attention to their intake of omega-3, a polyunsaturated fatty acid. Omega-3 fatty acids have anti-inflammatory properties. They can reduce triglyceride levels in the blood and are good for the heart and blood vessels. Since the human body cannot make these fatty acids on its own, they must be obtained from diet.

One of the main sources of omega-3 is fish oil, but fish isn't the only food that provides omega-3. Other good sources of omega-3 fats include oils made from walnuts, flaxseeds, chia seeds, and rapeseeds. Just one tablespoon of flaxseed oil, for example, can meet an adult's daily need for omega-3.

Since a whole-plant diet encourages the ingestion of only a small amount of oil, Dr. Chang suggested that people on such a diet eat a tablespoon of flaxseed powder every day. Dr. Chang himself does this every day. "You can ground flaxseeds into powder and add it to your food or drink," the doctor said. "You can also eat the powder directly with water." Eating powder instead of oil has another benefit: it prevents you from ingesting the additives used in the oil production process.

People on a whole-plant diet are also advised to pay attention to their Vitamin B12 intake. Vitamin B12 is an important nutrient that helps make red blood cells and DNA, the genetic material in all cells. Though gut bacteria in the large intestine of humans can make B12, humans cannot absorb it there. The absorption of most nutrients occurs in the small intestines, upstream from the large intestines. Vegetables and fruit do not contain B12, which is why vegetarians are



Dietician Su Zhen-ying of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital pointed out that a whole-food, plant-based diet, if properly planned and executed, can satisfy the health needs of people of all ages.

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recommended to take B12 supplements.

That being said, vitamin B12 deficiency isn't just an issue for people who eat only plant-based foods; meat eaters may face the same problem too.

Dr. Chang explained that vitamin B12 from food must be bound to intrinsic factor, a protein secreted by cells in the stomach, for normal absorption. Since intrinsic factor is made in the stomach, conditions affecting the normal workings of the stomach can interfere with the availability of intrinsic factor. People with gastric ulcers, those taking antacids, or those who have had a gastrectomy are therefore advised to take B12 supplements.

America's National Academy of Medicine (formerly called the Institute of Medicine), on the other hand, recommends that everyone aged 50 or above, vegetarian or not, should take B12 supplements.

Let the Numbers Do the Talking The Malaysian Experience

By Lim Li Tian

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

The persistent prevalence of COVID-19 infections in Malaysia served as the backdrop for the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge. More than 1,800 people have taken part since its inception nearly a year ago. They took charge of their health by participating, and were happy to see the results.

In November 2020, Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia and members of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor chapter of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) started the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge. By early September 2021, 1,807 people, ranging in age from 7 to 85, had taken up the challenge. Nearly half of them were not vegetarian. The program is still ongoing.

"The results of the participants' blood tests have greatly touched me," said Dr. Lim Lei Jun (林磊君). "It's really uplifting! Never before in my 20-year practice have I seen changes in the right direction for so many people in just a three-week period. Their improvements were not in just one metric, but in all metrics." Dr. Lim's comments came in an online event marking the end of the first round of the health challenge program. At that time, she had seen the test results of just 50 program participants, but many more positive results have poured in since.

Volunteers staffing the program have so far collected more than 800 test results and accumulated ample experience. They have shared the impressive outcomes of the health challenge online with Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan and other countries, inspiring the launch of similar initiatives elsewhere. The project is especially relevant during a time when COVID-19 has impacted so many lives and caused so many deaths.

In July and August 2021, the pandemic in Malaysia worsened rapidly. By late August, an

average of 20,000 new cases were being identified each day. By September, the country had accumulated 2,000,000 COVID infections and 22,000 deaths. Associate Professor Dr. Tan Toh Leong (陳沱良), an emergency physician at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre, treats COVID-19 patients every day. He said in an interview that severe COVID patients experienced such difficulty breathing it was as if they were drowning. Some of them even had to endure the pain of intubation. "You absolutely wouldn't want any of that," he said.

Research has confirmed that chronic diseases increase the risk of severe illnesses and death from COVID-19 infections. Statistics released by the Malaysian government showed that of all who had died from COVID-19, close to 90 percent had suffered from at least one chronic disease. Sixty-five percent had suffered from high blood pressure, nearly half had diabetes, one quarter had heart disease, 20 percent kidney disease, and 17 percent high cholesterol.

Besides getting vaccinated and avoiding infections, the first order of business in dealing with the pandemic would be to try to bring down the risk of severe illnesses from COVID-19 infections for people suffering from chronic diseases. "What measure could be taken in one fell swoop to bring high blood glucose, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high uric acid all under better control?" Dr. Eddie Chan (陳成亨) pondered. He is the convener of TIMA Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, a practicing pediatrician,



and a consultant in nutritional, lifestyle, and anti-aging medicine. After poring over reams of research papers, he found that a plant-based diet could help control or even reverse chronic diseases. He began to actively promote the diet as a way to treat the underlying conditions that make COVID-19 even more deadly.

A dietary choice, not a substitute for medical care

Dr. Chan drew on the strengths of TIMA Kuala Lumpur and Selangor and community volunteers to promote the idea of a whole-food, plant-based diet in communities. He hoped that with the help of such a diet, people could better manage their blood fat, blood sugar, blood pressure, and body weight, and thus get a better handle on their health.

Behind the more-than-a-thousand participants of the diet challenge in Malaysia are more than a thousand families. Participants and their family members alike are happy about the health benefits from the program. At the same time, more people are learning how to eat healthy as vegetarians.

TOP LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF BILLY WONG HON MENG, RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF NG LEONG ENG, AND BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF KWAN POOI CHEN

Malaysia is ethnically diverse, so it shouldn't be surprising that spices and sauces of all types are indispensable in cooking. One of the challenges that faced people who wanted to try a whole-plant diet was how to cook a meal that met the diet's requirements. To counter the challenge, Dr. Chan and his team developed a healthy dietary project: the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge.



Under this project, menus were designed based on a healthy eating plate recommended by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. Restaurants were engaged to prepare lunch and dinner for participants. Participants could pick up the prepared meals at designated locations, or they could be delivered to their offices or homes. Participants were required only to make their own breakfast during the program.

Participants were encouraged to have blood tests before they started the diet and again at the conclusion of their 21-day round. The before-and-after tests would reveal the possible effects of the health challenge.

Keong Chee Hoe (姜志濠) is a 17-year vegetarian and a member of the program's central committee. He said that before the program could get started, their food quality control team needed to examine and sample the meals that participating restaurants prepared. They checked the foods' portion, presentation, and taste. Some

Started in Malaysia, the Healthier Me 21-Day Challenge has been introduced to Taiwan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, the United States, Canada, etc.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

restaurants failed quite miserably in the beginning, unable to pass muster even after four or five tries. "Their idea of a whole-food, plant-based diet was quite different from ours," Keong said. Because such a diet was so foreign to local restaurants, project organizers did what they could to help participating restaurants out in the process, working and learning with them to pull things off.

Communities in areas from Selangor, to Kuala Lumpur, to Kuching and other places formed teams to host the health challenge in their neighborhoods. Even though people had restricted mobility during the pandemic, the Internet afforded a good means for volunteers to commu-

nicate and work together. Program volunteers, wherever they were, had support from the central committee, consisting of advisory, coordination, medical, administrative, food quality control, and promotion teams, each staffed by volunteers with relevant expertise. For example, the food quality control team was made up of dietitians, physicians, and volunteers good at cooking. They carefully checked everything to ensure that participants ate only healthy and tasty food.

In an online exchange meeting each weekend, participants shared what breakfasts they had prepared for themselves and learned about healthy eating. When the first 21-day round ended, an event marking the closure was held online during which a doctor analyzed the overall performance of the participants and gave out awards to people with the best improvements in their blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, triglycerides, and weight. One closing event after another revealed that participants had remarkably high success rates in lowering their blood lipids, pressure, and glucose. Many enjoyed other unexpected benefits as well.

"I don't want to look at my old photos now. I used to have a big belly, but it's gone now," said Billy Wong Hon Meng (黃漢民), a 60-year-old entrepreneur who took part in the challenge. He approached the challenge in the same way he handled his business affairs in terms of diligence and intensity. He strictly adhered to the dietary guidelines prescribed by the program and abstained from alcohol during the 21 days. A blood test taken at the end of the round showed that his low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and triglyceride levels had dropped significantly. On top of that, he had shed five kilograms (11 pounds).

A doctor who had read Wong's blood test reports said that this health challenge had saved Wong's life. His triglycerides had been so high as to have caused his LDL to spike off the charts. In that sort of situation, a person ran a very high risk of falling victim to cardiovascular diseases.

After his 21-day challenge had concluded, Wong decided to learn to be a vegetarian. His wife saw his changes and signed up for the program as well. Wong said, "This diet can keep me healthy, so I must stay the course."

Oo Yi Qian (余奕倩) is a dietitian and a member of the food quality control team. She saw one example after another of improved health numbers among program participants, so she and her

husband signed up for the challenge too. "Medical care these days depends primarily on drugs to control high cholesterol, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, and high uric acid," said the dietitian. "Dietary changes and adjustments usually play a secondary role. Rarely have we seen examples of such obvious improvements in health numbers due to a modified diet alone. But in this program, we've seen abundant examples of reversals of high levels of blood pressure, blood lipid, blood glucose, and uric acid."

When Oo Yi Qian was studying for a master's degree in human nutrition at the University of Bonn, Germany, she read many research reports on nutrition that showed that people who consumed more plant-based foods were less likely to develop chronic diseases. Plants contained more nutrients than was generally known. That's why she became a vegetarian five years ago.

Despite the many benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet, program organizers reminded participants that this diet is a complement to, not a substitute for, medical care. The 21-day challenge gave participants an opportunity to experience the diet firsthand and provided them with a different dietary option, but the diet wasn't intended to replace the need for a doctor's supervision. Participants who were on medications still needed to continue their drug regimens and keep their doctors' appointments.

Staying the course with new diet knowledge

The 21-day healthy eating program not only introduces participants to the whole-plant diet, but helps participants understand what food is good for them, how to cook healthy, and how to stay on the diet after the challenge.

The health challenge is now being carried out in Taiwan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, the United States, Canada, and other places. In Malaysia, the program's success has attracted the attention of local university researchers. They are planning to collaborate with Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor to use the results in scientific research. Staff at the health department of the Sarawak state government are also pondering how to bring this healthy diet plan into hospitals to improve the health of medical workers.

Dr. Eddie Chan and his team plan to promote the healthy diet to more institutions and regions. "I hope to bring about changes to society by helping more people understand the health benefits of a plant-based diet," said the doctor. ♣

Twin Challenges

Rendering Aid After Haiti's Quake

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Keziah Jean

Tzu Chi volunteers faced twin challenges as they worked to get aid into the hands of earthquake victims in Haiti: COVID-19 and gang violence. With both raging in Haiti, volunteers had to take their every step with the utmost caution.

In the summer of 2021, with COVID-19 still rampant in many countries, several man-made and natural disasters hit North America and Asia. Their effects were felt around the world. First, Haiti's president Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in his private residence on July 7, plunging the country into political turmoil. Then, as the nation was still reeling from the violent tragedy, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake hit on August 14, killing more than 2,000 people. The tremor also destroyed or damaged nearly 130,000 buildings, leaving 650,000 people in dire need of help. Immediately afterwards, on August 15, Taliban insurgents took Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, and leveraged themselves into power. This political upheaval triggered a massive exodus of Afghan people from their country. For a while, Afghanistan commanded the attention of the entire world, and Haiti's plight was all but forgotten.

But Tzu Chi didn't forget the Haitians or their dire need for help. Local volunteers assessed the damage in disaster areas and provided whatever aid they could soon after the quake. Then, on September 1, a Tzu Chi team from the United States arrived in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, to help organize quake relief work. Upon arrival, the team visited the campus of the Overseas Engineering & Construction Co. (OECC). The OECC is one of Tzu Chi's partners in Haiti. There the team met with several people to discuss Tzu Chi's relief plan, including Johnson Chang (張永忠), an OECC employee and Tzu Chi volunteer,

and Father Zucchi Olibrice, another Tzu Chi volunteer. They decided to launch large-scale distributions in Les Cayes, a badly hit area in southwestern Haiti, on September 8.

The arrival of the Tzu Chi volunteers was a godsend for some Catholic priests and nuns, who were worn out from tending to quake victims. Many people had lost their homes in the strong quake and desperately needed food and other supplies. The rice and other necessities Tzu Chi was planning to distribute would go a long way toward relieving their plight. "We didn't have anything to distribute to the victims after the quake," said Sister Rose Monique Jolicoeur of the Soeurs Salésiennes. "The aid operation initiated by Tzu Chi is so important to the locals."

It wouldn't be easy to get the aid to victims though. In addition to the threat of COVID-19, another challenge facing Tzu Chi was gang violence. Volunteers and partners would have to proceed with the utmost caution.

Initiating help

"I've been in Haiti for 22 years," said volunteer Johnson Chang, who is from Taiwan. "When the big earthquake hit in 2010, I happened to be on a leave of absence from work and was back in Taiwan. This latest tremor was the first massive earthquake I've experienced in Haiti."

Chang explained that the quake had occurred



during work hours in the morning of August 14. It was deeply shocking. Around noon, he learned that the epicenter was located in the southwestern part of the nation, and he heard reports of collapsed churches and private residences. The first thing he did as a Tzu Chi volunteer in Haiti after the quake was to inquire after the safety of other Tzu Chi volunteers in the country. He also contacted the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne to find out whether the three schools Tzu Chi had helped rebuild for the Congregation after the 2010 quake had been damaged. Fortunately, no volunteer was injured in the temblor, and the three schools, located on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the epicenter, were still standing. The Tzu Chi Haiti Campus, also located in the capital, had made it safely through the temblor too.

Despite that good news, the southwestern part of the nation had been devastated. The energy released by the quake this time was twice the amount released by the quake of 2010, resulting in

Heavy bags of food provided by Tzu Chi for quake victims in Haiti. The foundation launched large-scale distributions in the country after it was hit by a massive earthquake on August 14, 2021.

huge casualties. Cities such as Les Cayes and Jérémie were among the hardest hit.

Adding insult to injury was a tropical storm that battered Haiti within days of the devastating quake. Pummeled by a rapid succession of unfortunate events—the assassination of the nation's president, the earthquake, and now the storm—Haiti, an impoverished country, was ill-equipped to handle it all alone. Acting President Ariel Henry appealed to the international community for help.

Immediately afterwards, the Haitian General Directorate of Civil Protection and Taiwan's embassy in Haiti sent people to the Tzu Chi Haiti Campus to talk with volunteers about quake relief matters. When Johnson Chang learned that survivors in the disaster areas were in dire need of tents



and sleeping bags, he quickly arranged for the donation of 500 blankets, which were stored at the time in the warehouse at the Tzu Chi campus. Father Zucchi Olibrice quickly provided rice for quake survivors too. The rice was originally intended for lunch for schoolchildren after the new semester began, but “saving lives comes first,” said the Father. “Nothing is more important now than attending to the needs of quake victims.”

After sending off the 500 blankets mentioned above, Chang, a civil engineer by profession, traveled to the disaster zones on August 21 to assess conditions. He saw broken walls, piles of debris everywhere, and people sheltering in tents. In Les Cayes, a beautiful port city with a 500-year history, at least three hotels and two churches had collapsed. Among those killed was Gabriel Fortuné, a former mayor of Les Cayes. Hospitals were packed with the injured. But those who had it worst were people living in indigent rural areas. Almost none of the makeshift houses farmers had built on their own had survived the temblor.

Chang pointed out that unlike Port-au-Prince, which is shielded by mountains on the northern and southern sides, the disaster areas had no such natural buffer. Residents there live at the full

Volunteer Johnson Chang inspects a damaged house in quake-stricken Les Cayes. Because of poverty, many people in Haiti couldn't build houses up to the government's building codes. With crooked tree trunks used in place of steel bars, a house could barely withstand the strong earthquake.

RÉGINALD LOUIS SAINT JUNIOR

mercy of Mother Nature. To protect themselves from hurricanes, residents tried to erect buildings that could withstand strong winds. “But it was beyond them [because of their poverty] to follow the building codes and use reinforced concrete to construct their houses,” said Chang. “Instead, they resorted to the use of crooked tree branches or trunks as pillars. Even the concrete mix they used wasn't correctly proportioned. With all of that, it's no surprise their houses didn't stand a chance against the strong earthquake.”

Seeing the challenges confronting Haiti following the assassination of its president and the catastrophic earthquake, Tzu Chi mobilized volunteers in the United States to help out. Veteran volunteers including James Chen (陳健), Curtis Hsing (邢敏), and Ting Fan (范婷), as well as Jaime Puerta, who would help photograph and docu-



ment their trip to Haiti, arrived in the nation two weeks after the quake. Chen, Hsing, and Fan had all taken part in Tzu Chi's relief efforts after the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Another purpose of their trip this time was to help train local volunteers so that they would be better able to respond to a future disaster and shoulder the responsibility to help their own people. “Haiti must stand up on its own,” said Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), deputy CEO of Tzu Chi USA.

The threat of the pandemic and gang violence

On August 23, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. increased its travel warning for Haiti from level 3 to level 4, indicating a very high level of COVID-19 in the country. Scant medical resources, low vaccine cov-

A quake survivor stands amidst the ruins of his home in Camp-Perrin, Les Cayes.

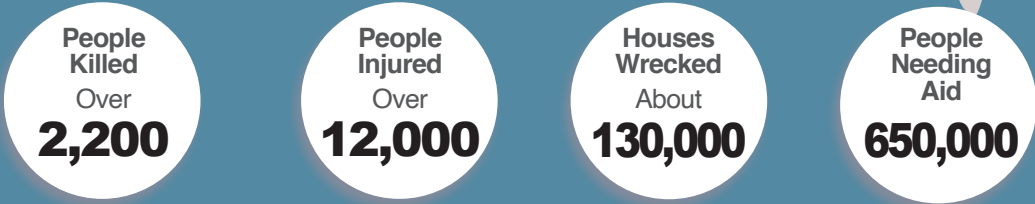
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erage, and people's lack of vigilance against the coronavirus in Haiti posed a challenge for Tzu Chi volunteers as they worked to carry out the foundation's quake relief operation. Every member on the Tzu Chi U.S. team had been fully vaccinated before they went to Haiti, but they took due precautionary measures during their stay in the country, such as wearing masks and tracking their temperature.

Another challenge was the rampant gang violence in Haiti. The situation was so bad even the military and police were at their wits' end. Chang said the reason he didn't visit the disaster areas

Tzu Chi Responded to the 2021 Haitian Quake

A magnitude 7.2 tremor jolted Haiti at 8:29 a.m. on August 14. The epicenter was about 75 miles west of the capital of Port-au-Prince. This extremely shallow quake released twice as much energy as that released by the tremor that devastated Port-au-Prince 11 years ago. The country's southwestern region was left in ruins.



Aid Provided by Tzu Chi After the Quake

Tzu Chi planned to distribute aid to 14,000 families in Les Cayes and Jérémie, two hard-hit areas. The following distributions had been completed by mid-September 2021:

Date	Partner	Families Aided	Goods Distributed
Sept. 3 and 6	Salésiens de Don Bosco	2,000	4,000 bags of rice
Sept. 8	Soeurs Salésiennes	1,000	2,000 bags of rice
Sept. 10	Caritas Haiti	1,250	1,250 bags of rice and 1,250 bags of assorted food items
Sept. 11	Salésiens de Don Bosco	1,000	1,000 bags of rice and 1,000 bags of assorted food items
Sept. 15	Agricultural mission from Taiwan	1,000	2,000 bags of rice

until August 21 was because the main streets there were blocked by gangs. The threat of gang violence was another reason the relief operation this time was much more difficult to conduct than after the 2010 quake. Back then, personnel from disaster response organizations were protected from gangs by the United Nations peacekeeping forces and U.S. troops. But now, with foreign troops having withdrawn from the country, if a truck laden with relief supplies were to enter road sections controlled by gangs, a robbery or black-mailing might occur. Faced with the danger posed by gangs, Tzu Chi volunteers and partners had to be very circumspect and stand at the ready to make any last-minute change of plans.

On the same day the Tzu Chi U.S. team arrived in Port-au-Prince, relief goods provided by Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan and the Taiwan Red Cross arrived at the Tzu Chi Haiti Campus. Six thousand five hundred family medical kits packed by Tzu Chi volunteers in the United States had also been loaded for shipping from Miami to Haiti. In addition to the relief items from abroad, volunteers also purchased goods locally for distribution. With the enthusiastic support of a supplier, Tzu Chi was able to obtain a wide variety of goods in large quantities, including rice, beans, corn, spaghetti, macaroni, and cooking oil. All told, each recipient family would receive a 12.5-kilo-

A Timeline of Tzu Chi's Aid to Haiti

- Sept. 1998** ➤ Haiti is among several countries in the region hit by Hurricane Georges.
- Oct. to Dec. 1998** ➤ Tzu Chi and six other NGOs from Taiwan form a joint inspection team and visit four affected countries to assess damage. The foundation subsequently launches a clothing drive to help victims. Four cargo containers of clothes are sent to Haiti.
- Aug. and Sept. 2008** ➤ Three hurricanes and a tropical storm strike Haiti.
- Jan. 2009** ➤ Tzu Chi initiates a humanitarian aid and disaster relief program for Haiti.
- Jan. to Feb. 2010** ➤ A magnitude 7 earthquake hits Haiti on January 12, killing over 300,000 people and affecting 1,500,000 others. Tzu Chi responds by launching medical care services, aid distributions, and work relief programs for survivors.
- Nov. 2012** ➤ Days of torrential rains lead to severe flooding in Cap-Haïtien, Haiti's second largest city. Tzu Chi volunteers in the country assess damage and distribute aid.
- May 2013** ➤ Three schools that Tzu Chi helped the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne rebuild in Haiti after the 2010 quake are inaugurated.
- Aug. 2013** ➤ Tzu Chi starts sending rice provided by Taiwan's Council of Agriculture to Haiti for distribution to the needy.
- Nov. 2014** ➤ Tzu Chi conducts relief work for flood victims in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien.
- July 2015** ➤ A kindergarten—the Centre Educatif Carmen René Durocher—that Tzu Chi helped rebuild after the 2010 quake is inaugurated.
- Aug. 2021** ➤ A 7.2 tremor hits Haiti on the 14th. Tzu Chi launches a relief operation amidst a raging pandemic.

gram (28-pound) bag of rice and a 25-kilogram (55-pound) bag of assorted food items. Considering that people in the disaster areas might have difficulty obtaining clean drinking water, volunteers also managed to procure water purification pills for distribution. Each set of food aid included 20 water purification pills, enough to purify a hundred gallons of water. When Keziah Jean, a local photographer helping to record Tzu Chi activities, learned that the foundation was including water purification tablets in its distribution items, she was surprised and happy. She said that the kind of water purification tablets Tzu Chi was providing had already been in great demand in Haiti before the quake, and they became even

harder to get after the quake. "People who receive Tzu Chi's aid will definitely be very happy," she said. "Access to clean water has long been an issue in Haiti. Many people have died after becoming sick from drinking unclean water, so it's very considerate of Tzu Chi to try to help address this issue." **Cutting it close** In a warehouse that belonged to the supplier in Port-au-Prince, 5,000 sets of food aid that Tzu Chi was going to distribute to quake survivors were stacked in neat piles, ready for transportation to distribution venues. The bags of rice and assorted food items all had handles, which would make

them easier for recipients to carry.

Dashka Bennett, vice president of the supplier, had worked for days with Tzu Chi volunteers to help them pull off the relief mission this time. She said to the volunteers, “You guys are all foreigners and you are doing so much for my country that has motivated me to do more for my country. I try to do what I can within my sector, but Tzu Chi really touched me. I mean if you guys can leave your homes, your country, and your jobs and come here to help, I should be able to do more also.”

In addition to preparing for distributions, volunteers also conducted training classes for local native volunteers. They answered questions and listened to what the attendants of the classes had

to say about volunteering with Tzu Chi in Haiti. At the same time, volunteer James Chen prepared several culinary volunteers for the hot meal distributions the foundation was planning to launch later by teaching them how to prepare Tzu Chi instant rice. Everything seemed to be going well, but challenges soon arose.

Because some roads were blocked by gangs, the goods provided by Tzu Chi could not be transported in time to the disaster areas for a September 8 distribution in Les Cayes. Volunteers contacted nuns of the Soeurs Salésiennes in the city with whom they were working to hold the distribution to talk about postponing the event, but the nuns had already sent out the claim checks for the distribution to one thousand participating families.

The recipients were all looking forward to receiving the aid on the scheduled day.

Not wanting to disappoint so many families, the U.S. team asked Dashka Bennett if she could rustle up enough rice near Les Cayes to distribute to everyone on September 8. Bennett made call after call before finally finding suppliers that could provide 2,000 bags of rice, each weighing 12.5 kilograms, for the distribution.

It was September 6 when Bennett had completed the transactions—less than 48 hours from the scheduled time of the distribution. Would the 2,000 bags of rice arrive at the event venue in time? The jury was still out.

The Tzu Chi U.S. team in Port-au-Prince was on tenterhooks. And there were other events

planned too, in addition to the September 8 event. Would the relief goods for those other distributions arrive in time from Port-au-Prince? James Chen said he was so worried he had difficulty falling asleep for several nights in a row.

To help Haiti recover from the massive quake, Taiwan’s government, the Tzu Chi headquarters

Tzu Chi volunteers donate rice to nuns of Soeurs Salésiennes for further distribution to quake victims (top left). A bag of rice and another bag of assorted food items are enough to last a family of six to eight for a month (right, photo by Ting Fan). People proceed in orderly lines to receive aid from Tzu Chi (bottom left).





in Taiwan, and the Taiwan Red Cross had together provided 25 tons of goods to donate to people in Haiti. A donation ceremony was held on September 7 in Port-au-Prince. Tzu Chi volunteers, still on pins and needles, attended the event. Haiti's acting president, Ariel Henry, was also present, as well as Taiwan's ambassador to Haiti, Ku Wen-jiann (古文劍). That afternoon at four, the Tzu Chi U.S. team and volunteers in Port-au-Prince set off in two groups from the capital to Les Cayes, 150 kilometers (93 miles) away, to help with the distribution on September 8 and other distributions planned for the following days.

The groups made detours to avoid the road sections controlled by gangs. Though the strategy ensured their safety, it also prolonged the trips. It was almost midnight by the time the entire team arrived at Les Cayes. At six the next morning, trucks delivering the rice to be distributed that day arrived at the distribution venue. Even nuns who were getting on in years helped unload the rice. Parishioners enthusiastically helped out too.

James Chen breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the 2,000 bags of rice from different suppliers arrive safely. "I've taken part in countless distributions before," he said, "but this was the first time the goods to be given arrived on the very day

A Tzu Chi volunteer training class in session. The purpose of such classes is to inspire and help more people in Haiti to serve their own people. TING FAN

of the distribution. This was practically a mission impossible."

The distributions

The scheduled distribution kicked off at ten that morning as planned. Quake survivors had started arriving early that morning and had been waiting outside the school that was serving as the event venue. With police on-site maintaining order, survivors entered the venue in an orderly fashion. Each participating family received two bags of rice, weighing a total of 25 kilograms (55 pounds). After receiving their rice, aid recipients left with smiles on their faces.

"My home was completely destroyed," said Rose Myrlie Jabrun, an aid recipient. "I got hit in the leg when the quake hit, and I've been sleeping in the street ever since. The price of food is very high now. Thank you for helping us." Alphonse Thermitus, another recipient, pointed out that there was a lot of hunger in the disaster areas and people were badly in need of food. "I hope God

gives Tzu Chi volunteers more strength so they can come back and give us more help."

While quake victims received much needed food, volunteers gained joy from helping others. Jennyva Ocean, the daughter of volunteer James Ocean, said, "Before, when I wanted to participate [in Tzu Chi events], my father told me I was too young. Now that I'm 16, I asked to participate again. My father finally agreed. I'm very happy I can be here and contribute what I can."

After the distribution, the rice and other food items Tzu Chi had purchased in Port-au-Prince finally arrived in Les Cayes, in time for the other scheduled distributions. In cooperation with Caritas Haiti and the Salésiens de Don Bosco, Tzu Chi held two distributions on September 10 and 11 in the port city for more than 2,000 families.

At the distribution venues, people clutching claim checks waited peacefully to receive their supplies. Despite the long lines, they remained patient. After they had received their aid, most of them hurried back home by way of tap taps, colorfully painted buses that serve as shared taxis in Haiti. After all, it was extremely dangerous in a disaster area suffering from severe shortages of food to stroll through the streets carrying two big bags of food.

"I've never witnessed such a peaceful, orderly distribution in Haiti during which people showed such respect for each other," said Dashka Bennett after taking part in one of the distributions. "People were all smiles with the heavy bags of

food they had received in hand." She added it was an honor to work with Tzu Chi and that taking part in the mission this time, bringing hope to families, had been a touching experience. "You can count on me to continue to serve the people in Haiti with you!"

About a month had passed since the earthquake by the time of these distributions, but many people in the disaster areas were still living in the streets. Food and medicine were still sorely lacking. James Chen really felt for the survivors. "The tent areas we've visited this time were a far cry from those we visited after the 2010 earthquake. Any place set up with tarpaulins is considered 'deluxe' this time. There was even a tent area consisting almost entirely of rickety structures shoddily built with palm fronds."

Tzu Chi volunteers will continue to work with local Catholic groups to deliver more aid to the needy. Besides providing food and other supplies, volunteers will also continue to offer training to local volunteers to help them serve their own people. They hope that with everyone working together, a synergistic effect can be created that can more quickly help quake survivors through the difficult time and get back on their feet. ☘

Members of a Tzu Chi team from the United States pose with volunteers in Haiti after a training course. James Chen (second from left), the leader of the Tzu Chi team, has visited Haiti 79 times for Tzu Chi work.



Hot Meals Warm Hearts in Germany

By Liu Huang-wen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Lin Mei-feng

Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe launched a meal service in Bad Münstereifel, western Germany, in the aftermath of the massive flooding that hit Europe in July 2021. With water, gas, and electricity not yet restored locally, the service won the hearts of residents and disaster response workers alike.

My wife, You Yue-ying (游月英), and I are both Tzu Chi volunteers in Austria. Early on the morning of August 2, 2021, we crossed the border into Germany and at 8 a.m. met up with volunteer Susan Chen (陳樹微). With me at the steering wheel of a nine-person minibus, we set out for Cologne in western Germany.

We hit the periphery of Munich more than an hour later, and immediately became ensnarled in a traffic jam. We traveled very slowly through that area. We turned into the city of Ulm, situated on the river Danube, after noon for lunch. After that short break, we drove for over 300 kilometers (186 miles) before finally arriving in Cologne. It was evening by that time. All told, I drove for 12 hours that day, covering nearly a

thousand kilometers (620 miles). I felt good about myself—I'm no longer young, but age has not weakened me.

At 10:30 the next morning, Chen contacted a staffer from the social welfare department of the municipal government of Weilerswist and made an appointment to meet her in a restaurant. She briefed us, a group of volunteers from Austria and several cities in Germany, on the floods that had hit the area two weeks before.

According to her account, the rain started on July 14, leading to sudden, severe flooding early the next morning. The water rose so fast it was as if a dam was letting out torrents of water. Houses in low-lying areas were immediately swamped, catching local residents completely off guard. Before they could do anything, farmland, roads, embankments, trees, and cars in the area had been wiped out.

Over the next few days, we visited several towns that had been hit hard, including Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler and Bad Münstereifel. The devastation we saw was beyond description and left us stunned. Floodwaters had swept along waterways and across roads, washing out the foundations of houses and leaving behind large holes. We saw exposed electric wire lines, natural gas lines, and water pipes. The sidewalks in business districts were a sorry sight, covered in mud and debris. Stores were wrecked, inside and out. Even bridges had been torn apart. Some houses were in such bad shape I wondered if their inhabitants had been able to escape in time.

Many houses were 200 or 300 years old and had been listed as historic places. The materials of which they were constructed were not as durable and strong as those employed in modern buildings. The concrete—or should I say “earth and wheat straw”—in some of their walls simply dissolved in the flood's onslaught. Walls made of plaster couldn't withstand the ravages of the floodwaters either. Many ceilings were badly damaged and had caved in as well.

Tzu Chi's food truck was parked in the town hall square in Bad Münstereifel. A small blackboard on the outside of the truck announced the daily menu. The meal service was offered for nearly a month, with a hundred to 500 meals served each day.





The most heartrending story occurred in the town of Sinzig. On that fateful night, 16 residents of a care home for people with disabilities were evacuated to safety, but when rescue personnel returned to the facility to rescue the rest, the floodwaters had already risen to the second floor. The 12 remaining residents had drowned, trapped in the submerged first floor.

It was two weeks after the floods when we visited the disaster areas. Even though half a month had passed, I never once saw a bird in the sky or an animal on the ground while we were there. It's easy to imagine how terrifying the rain had been.

Hard to say goodbye

It was difficult for residents in the badly hit areas to cook their meals because the infrastructure for water, electricity, and natural gas had been damaged in the floods. In response, social service groups had been offering sausages and

Western Germany suffered severe flooding in July 2021. A building in a flood-stricken area might appear intact on the outside, but its foundation, having been soaked in floodwaters, was no longer solid and strong, rendering the building unsuitable for habitation.

French fries to those who needed the food. Residents, relief workers, and civil engineers had been eating the same things for two weeks. After talking with Sabine Preiser-Marian, the mayor of Bad Münstereifel, we decided to launch a meal service in her town to offer something different.

We ended our damage-assessment trip on August 5. On August 6, when we were returning home and about to pass through Frankfurt, Sister Chen got hold of a company in Cologne that specializes in specialty vehicles. We immediately turned around and returned to Cologne. We visit-



Tzu Chi Responded to the Flood Disaster in Western Germany

Mid-July

- Torrential downpours pounded western Europe in mid-July 2021. Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands received more than an average month's rain in just 24 hours.
- The heavy rainfalls caused rivers in Germany's western states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate to overflow their banks, inundating villages and towns. More than 170 people perished, and tens of thousands were forced from their homes.

August 3 to 5

- Tzu Chi volunteers from Germany and Austria met in Cologne, western Germany, before proceeding to visit several flood-stricken areas. Based on their findings, they decided to focus their aid on Bad Münstereifel, North Rhine-Westphalia.

August 13 to September 11

- Bad Münstereifel, located 55.4 kilometers (34 miles) southwest from Cologne, is a scenic historic town with a population of about 17,000. Residents rely on tourism or small factories for a living. The serious floods devastated the town and its economic activities. An estimated 2,500 households were affected. The town's mayor described the flooding as the worst disaster to hit Bad Münstereifel since World War II.
- Military personnel, civil engineering teams, and NGO staffers arrived at the disaster areas in the aftermath of the floods to help with the recovery efforts. The fare of these disaster response workers was simple. Tzu Chi volunteers decided to provide hot food in Bad Münstereifel as a way to show their support for residents and those helping.
- Volunteers from Austria, the Netherlands, and several cities in Germany, including Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, and Cologne, put in 303 shifts from August 13 to September 11 to provide the meal service.
- A total of 10,021 hot meals were served during that period.



ed the company and decided to rent a food truck from them. The truck was well-equipped, with four gas stoves, a sink, a refrigerator, an oven, an exhaust hood, and a countertop.

On August 12, a group of volunteers arrived at Bad Münstereifel to learn how to use the food truck. We launched our meal service the very next

day. Three volunteers from Germany—Yang Wen-cun (楊文村), Lin Sen-xi (林森喜), and Miu Lian-huang (繆連煌)—were responsible for preparing the food. They were great cooks. More than 200 servings of vegetarian chow mein were served that day.

Volunteers from Germany, Austria, and the



Netherlands worked in relay teams to provide hot meals over the next four weeks. Residents were happy to try food from a variety of cooking styles. On August 21, a group of volunteers from Vienna, Austria, led by volunteer Liu Jian-guo (劉建國), set out to Bad Münstereifel to take over from the previous team. My wife and I were also on the Austrian team. We brought with us all kinds of cooking utensils, condiments, rice, pasta, and other food. Before we started serving food the next day, we tidied up a bicycle parking lot near our food truck and an area the local government was using to temporarily store some desks and chairs. The environment around us looked so much neater and cleaner after we were done. We received quite a few compliments for our work that day.

Residents also heaped praise on the vegetarian meals we offered. During the week our team was on duty, we gave out about 500 servings of food

Civil engineering workers appreciated having hot food to eat in the disaster area, and they identified with Tzu Chi's efforts to promote vegetarianism, which they agreed is good for the Earth. The German government has relaxed their precautionary measures for COVID-19, allowing people to go mask-free while outdoors.

per day. It was all hustle and bustle during meal-time each day, like a party was going on.

Tzu Chi's meal service ended on September 11. I know the locals are going to miss our food and the friendly, peaceful ambience on-site. I'm happy I wasn't one of the volunteers who was there at the end of the service; I would have been very sad to see the sad looks on the locals' faces. Estimates are that it will take two years for the flood-hit areas to rebuild. Good-bye, my friends. I hope we'll meet again. ☸

Another Million Donated

Narrated by Chen Li

Compiled by Zhang Yu-fan

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Though a temporary worker before she retired, volunteer Chen Li (陳麗) was able to save quite a lot of money by living frugally. Instead of leaving her money behind for her children to fight over after she passes, she decided it would be wiser to donate it to a meaningful cause while still alive.

When I was young, Mom always taught us six kids to save for a rainy day. I didn't realize until I grew up that she pinched every penny simply because we were poor. That's not surprising, given that most families in Taiwan were impoverished back then.

I've just reached my 63rd birthday. I'm the fourth oldest child in my family. I have a twin younger sister and a younger brother. The burden of supporting our large family fell completely on our dad. He didn't have much of a formal education, and so he relied on manual labor to provide for us. It wasn't easy supporting so many children with his hard-earned money.

Mom told me that before my twin sister and I were born, Dad left home to work as a longshoreman at Keelung Port, northern Taiwan, to put food on our table. There was no machinery at the time to help with loading and unloading ships; everything depended on human muscle power. As soon as a ship docked, Dad got busy moving goods, and he was paid when the job was done. The more goods he moved, the more he was paid. However, there was no well-established labor protection system at the time. If a longshoreman like my dad was inadvertently injured at work, he would often just apply a simple bandage before going right back to work. He might see a doctor after work—but then he alone would have to take care of the resulting medical bill.

Unfortunately, Dad began to experience health issues not long after my twin sister and I were born. We didn't know whether it was because the work of a dockworker was too strenuous for him, or because he had suffered injuries at work and

had failed to have them properly tended to. Whatever the reason, he eventually was forced to quit working at the wharf.

After Dad became ill, it became even more difficult for our family to make ends meet. Our parents had no choice but to sell the land our grandpa had left, but they didn't get much for it. Mom often lamented later that they had sold the land far too cheaply, but sold it was, and it was too late to regret it—they could only grind their teeth as they continued to struggle financially. My family was so destitute that my older sister had to quit school before she even made it through first grade to help take care of us at home. Our parents even considered giving my twin sister and me up for adoption, but eventually decided against it. Dad just couldn't bear the thought of parting with us.

With money so tight, we got by almost entirely on rice porridge—the only exceptions being the first and 15th of each lunar month, when as a traditional practice we made food offerings to the deities and our ancestors. When we were done with the worship rituals, the food was ours to eat. My siblings and I were always counting the days until the next first or 15th when we could eat better. On those days, we could never eat fast enough—if you were too slow, the food would be gone before you knew it. However, we could never beat the boys when it came to eating fast. We were constantly complaining to our parents about our brothers eating too fast and too much! And yet, when I think back to those days now, I realize that though it was no fun fighting over food at the time, it was a blessing our family had a



roof over our heads and that we could eat together as a complete family.

Maybe because of the difficult life we led growing up, I came to realize acutely what a terrible thing it was for a family to suffer the double whammy of illness and poverty. That's why later in my life I constantly reminded myself to watch out for my safety and take good care of my health to avoid becoming ill.

The first million

One day in 1991, my husband and I passed a high school and saw a poster pasted next to the school gate announcing an upcoming event that was part of a series of lectures entitled "Blessed Life." We were free at the time of the event, so my husband and I signed up for it. When we entered the venue on the scheduled day, we were each given a manila envelope containing some publications, including a pamphlet introducing Dharma Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi and a copy of the *Tzu Chi Monthly* magazine.

I don't remember much about what was said during the lectures that day, but I remember clearly something a Tzu Chi volunteer said about her volunteer experience. As she was talking about chanting the Buddha's name for the deceased at funerals or other occasions, to bring peace to the soul of the departed and solace to the bereaved, she commented, "What is there to be afraid of? The deceased are gone." In traditional Chinese society, people don't like to speak of death, and they tend to avoid funerals unless they are for their loved ones and friends. This was even more true back then, when people were generally more conservative. I was therefore impressed when I heard that volunteer's words. I was struck by the novelty and unconventionality of her ideas.

On the day after the event, I leafed through the Tzu Chi publications I had received, and called the number of a Tzu Chi office listed in one of them. I told them I wanted to donate to the foundation. I became a regular donor after that. Every month Sister Lin Xue-zhu (林雪珠), a senior volunteer in Taichung, central Taiwan, would come to my home to collect my donation and bring me the latest issue of *Tzu Chi Monthly* and a cassette tape of Master Cheng Yen's talks.

On September 21, 1999, a magnitude 7.3 earth-

Chen Li learned from her mother how small amounts of money, when saved over time, can grow to become quite substantial.

quake hit Taiwan, resulting in a massive loss of lives and property. When I learned later that Tzu Chi was starting a project to help rebuild school buildings damaged or destroyed in the tremor, I was worried. I thought: "How much money will it take to help rebuild 51 schools? Will the foundation have enough funds for it? What can I do to help ease Master Cheng Yen's burden?"

I was working as a laborer at a construction site at the time. As I worked, I calculated how much money I had in my bank account. I figured that with my frugal lifestyle, the chance of spending all my savings on myself was slim. So instead of letting my money sit in the bank doing nothing, I decided it'd be far better to donate it to Tzu Chi to help schoolchildren in the disaster areas attend class in new buildings.

Once I had made up my mind, I phoned Sister Xue-zhu and told her I wanted to donate a million Taiwanese dollars (US\$33,000) to Tzu Chi in my husband's name. She was stunned, and hesitated to accept my donation. She was worried that I would have trouble with my finances if I donated so much money to the foundation.

I reassured her that I'd be okay. I explained to her that what my husband earned constructing formwork at construction sites was enough to meet our expenditures. I told her I didn't have many expenses—I even cut my own hair! In fact, by saving almost every penny I made, I had unconsciously put aside as much as seven digits. Since I couldn't think of anything else to spend my money on, I decided I might as well put it to good use by donating it to a worthwhile cause.

I repeatedly reassured Xue-zhu that my family's finances would in no way be affected by my donation. Finally, she began to come around to my idea and began telling me what I needed to do to make the donation. After I donated that first million, I made a wish in my heart that I could donate millions more in the future in the name of my two sons. Not only would the money be used for meaningful work, but I would also accumulate blessings for my family.

The second million

Ten years ago, I donated another million Taiwanese dollars to Tzu Chi. A decade had passed since that first million donation, and I again had some money in the bank. I decided it was a good time to make another lump sum donation.

I had been a Tzu Chi donating member for more than 20 years by that time, but I felt bad that



aside from donating money to the foundation, I had done little else to help. Every time Tzu Chi needed volunteers to help with some work, I was the one with the local branch office who contributed the least. Xue-zhu often encouraged me to become a Tzu Chi commissioner, but I always told her I was too busy for that. A Tzu Chi commissioner must receive training, but I often need-

Chen is sparing with her money—except when it comes to donating it to charity. She gets around on a motor scooter, and almost everything she wears—including clothes and shoes—is from a recycling station. Even the shelves on the balcony at her home were made of discarded wooden materials salvaged from a recycling station.

BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO BY WU FANG-MEI

ed to work overtime at a construction site—not only in the evenings but during the weekends too. “I simply can’t spare the time [to train and take on the role of a commissioner]!” I’d say. It wasn’t until 2011, when work opportunities began to decrease, that I agreed to begin training to become a commissioner. I received my certification two years later.

I retired two years ago, and now I finally have more time to dedicate to my volunteer work. In the meantime, I continue to live frugally. Besides volunteering at the local Tzu Chi recycling station, I like going on “treasure hunts” there. Every time I see discarded clothes that still look good and that are about my size, I take them home to wear. If need be, I make alterations so that the clothes fit me better. As a result, I haven’t needed to buy any new clothes for myself in many years.

I salvaged more than discarded clothes from the recycling station. The shelves on the balcony at my home, for example, were built of some wooden planks I found at the station. The volunteers on my team often say I’m too frugal, but I am of the opinion that if an object can still be put to use, we shouldn’t let it go to waste. I never throw away a broken item at my home if it can still be fixed, whether it be a water filter or an electric appliance. After all, prolonging the life of things is the easiest way to cut expenses and save money.

The third million

Over the past two years, Tzu Chi has donated a lot of personal protective equipment and medical devices around the world to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic. I made a mental calculation and found that another decade had passed since my second donation of a million Taiwanese dollars. So I told Xue-zhu I’d like to donate another million, my third such donation.

I was concerned that my kids might be against it if they learned about my intention to donate another million, so I kept it from them. Truth be told, I had hesitated about the donation too, until I recalled what a Tzu Chi volunteer once said about how rather than leaving money behind for our children to fight over after we pass, it’d be wiser to donate it to a good cause while we are still alive. He was right—there was good sense in his words—so I decided to go ahead and donate a third time.

When Xue-zhu asked me in whose name I would like to make my donation this time, I thought of my mother, who passed away five



Chen (front line, middle) poses with fellow volunteers during snack time after tidying up a Tzu Chi facility.
COURTESY OF CHEN LI

years ago. I suddenly missed her so much. She always taught us that if we couldn’t keep the money we earned, we’d always be short of money no matter how much we made. I’m thankful to her for helping us realize the tremendous cumulative effect of small amounts of money saved over time. Our family would definitely have had a harder struggle financially if it weren’t for her. I’m also full of gratitude to her for bringing us up despite all the hard work involved, and for giving me such a healthy body that I have never had to spend money on medical needs. As a way to thank her, I decided to donate my third million in her name.

I didn’t earn much as a temporary worker at construction sites, but for more than 30 years I never stopped working, and so, coupled with my frugality, I was able to save some money. When I was done with a stint of work at a construction site, I moved on to another. And in winter, when construction work wasn’t so plentiful, I worked in a factory that made cotton quilts. I never missed an opportunity to make money. Because I earned every penny I donated, my husband never voiced any objection about my donations.

Many fellow volunteers say it is amazing that I willingly donate so much of my hard-earned money, but I never think much of it. Instead, I feel blessed I have the ability to give. Life has treated me well: I’ve never encountered any major setbacks, my husband and children have had good health, and I have even been able to save some money on the side and make donations to help the needy. I hope I can continue to give of my time, talent, and treasure in the future. ☸



When Taiwan raised its COVID-19 alert to level three in mid-May 2021, all schools pivoted to remote learning. Unfortunately, many underprivileged students didn't have computers at home. Tzu Chi volunteers, seeing the need, swung into action to help. They first tried to meet the need of some of the students by providing them with second-hand computers, then followed those efforts by partnering with the Asus Foundation in August to donate brand-new laptops to students across Taiwan. Everyone is entitled to an equal opportunity for education. Volunteers were happy to make the road to learning easier for needy students during the pandemic.

“I phoned families I helped care for to check on them,” said Tzu Chi volunteer Cheng Qiu-rong (程秋絨), of Xizhi District, northern Taiwan. “When I was talking to them, I asked them how their children were attending online classes. Some parents told me their children were using cell phones or computers borrowed from friends. The parents were worried that if they accidentally damaged the borrowed computers, they’d have to pay for a replacement.” Cheng heard their concerns. That’s why when she learned that Tzu Chi was working with the Asus Foundation to donate new laptop computers to needy students in Taiwan to help with distance learning, she immediately took action. With her help, several families received new computers this past August.

Cheng’s second oldest son, Zhang Kai-huang

(張楷鎧), helped install software on the computers and demonstrated to the students how to use them. The students were delighted to finally have their own computers to support their remote learning and online access. “Their joy was written over their faces,” Zhang said of the students. “I was so happy for them.”

Volunteers in Xizhi District distributed computers donated by Tzu Chi and the Asus Foundation to elementary, secondary, and university students in mid-August. Recipient students arrived at the Tzu Chi Xizhi office to receive their

A volunteer (left) installs software on a donated computer at a student’s home in Xizhi District, northern Taiwan.

YE JIN-HONG



If I Have a New Computer

Helping With Remote School Learning in Taiwan

By Wu Zhen-xiang and Zeng Xiu-xu

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Li Ya-zhen

computers accompanied by their grandmothers, fathers, or mothers. Volunteer Hong Yu-rui (洪玉蕊) said, "The youngsters looked a little shy when they first arrived at the office, but they broke into such bright smiles when they received the computers that it was impossible not to get caught up in their happiness."

Huang, an eighth grader, was one of the recipients. He said that he used to use a cell phone to attend classes, but the small screen size made seeing what was going on very difficult. He promised to make good use of his new computer. "I'll study hard and get good grades to thank my grandmother for raising me."

Feeling rich in heart

Ms. Wang, 39, had to work during the day and thus couldn't go to the Tzu Chi Xizhi office to receive the computer intended for her family, so volunteers made a special trip to her home to deliver the laptop.

Wang is from China and moved to Taiwan after she married a man on the island. Her marriage sadly ended in divorce, after which she had to raise her two daughters on her own. When she was applying for low-middle income status from the government, she needed a signature from her neighborhood chief. Her neighborhood chief thus learned about her financial situation and referred her to Tzu Chi for help and care.

Volunteers paid her a visit almost immediately after the neighborhood chief referred her to Tzu Chi. Wang said that she was surprised by the foundation's quick response. Then they even delivered subsidies for her daughters' education and a laptop to her home. She was deeply grateful.

Wang dreamed of a happy marriage when she tied the knot with her husband, but her dream was dashed when her marriage failed. "My husband and I divorced in March this year," Wang said. "He didn't want our two kids, and he shunned his responsibility of supporting them. I love our children very much. They keep me going, so I decided to raise them on my own." She added that she wasn't afraid of hardship, and that she'd been working hard to support her kids. She believed that with enough courage and resilience she'd make it through this rough patch in life. "I told my kids that as long as I have them, I have everything I need."

She couldn't hold back her tears as she talked about her past, but she reassured the visiting volunteers that she had emerged from the shadow of

her marriage. She thanked the volunteers and her fellow followers of Yiguandao, a religious sect, for their support. She said she had opened up her heart and was able to take in the love from people around her. "With so many people caring for me, I feel warm and rich."

Wang had been working for more than ten hours a day to support her family, but the pandemic put a stop to that. She was not one to be easily disheartened though. With her friends' encouragement, she started making vegetarian fried cake, chili sauce, and other food for sale. She said she loved cooking and would try to make a living out of selling vegetarian food.

Wang's younger daughter, a junior high school student, said that the pandemic stopped her from going to school. Shuttered behind the walls of her home, she often felt depressed. Happily, she could take part in an online learning program launched by Tzu Chi during the pandemic. She met with college students online every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday through the program. She enhanced her reading ability, learned new things, played games, and sang and danced. She loved singing and dancing the most because they always made her feel very cheerful.

The gift of love

In late August 2021, a vehicle carrying several Tzu Chi volunteers traveled along Xintai Fifth Road in the Xizhi District before taking a turn and driving into a community surrounded by green hills. The volunteers had come to visit the Li family. They wanted to find out how the two sons in the household were liking their new computers and if they needed any help with them. Mr. Li, the master of the family, suffered from oral cancer, but his happiness upon seeing the volunteers was obvious. He couldn't stop thanking them and saying how much difference the new computers had made. His sons had been using their mother's cell phone to do their homework, but it was difficult



and inconvenient. The computers helped them do their school work much more easily.

Mr. Li had a cell phone too, but it was an older model that was difficult to use. That's why his sons could only use their mother's cell phone. They really needed a computer, but just couldn't afford it, Li said with frustration. "We had no other way around it. A computer cost at least 20,000 to 30,000 Taiwanese dollars [US\$670 to 1,000]. We were too strapped for cash to afford one."

Though his illness was giving him a hard time, the love from society warmed his heart. He thanked Tzu Chi for helping underserved children, and voiced his expectations that his sons would give back to society in the future. "I hope they will contribute what they can," he said. "Even if they don't have money, they can still contribute their strength."

The younger son was a second grader. He said that a cell phone screen was so small that reading things on it was difficult. His joy at having his own computer was easy to imagine. He said he

Volunteers set up computers donated by Tzu Chi and the Asus Foundation for recipient students after a donation ceremony held in Xinying, southern Taiwan, on August 15, 2021.

LIN ROU-JIE

was still getting familiar with his computer. He planned to master his typing skills first, and then learn how to look up information online. "I'll cherish your gift of love," he said to the volunteers. Then he talked about what he wanted to be when he grew up: "I want to become a police officer." His older brother was moving into the sixth grade after the summer vacation. He wants to become a physician when he grows up. He feels he can help a lot of people in that profession.

A computer, though small, can connect children with the world. By mid-September 2021, Tzu Chi had distributed more than 4,000 computers to needy students in Taiwan. It's every volunteer's wish to help remove obstacles so that young people can focus on learning and pursue their dreams. ❀



A Rainbow Behind the Clouds

By Zhou Jun Wen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

After celebrating the Chinese New Year in 2020 with my family in Malaysia, I hurried back to work in Singapore. Little did I know at the time that COVID-19 would make it so difficult to see them again. Working alone in a foreign land, not a moment has passed without my hoping that the pandemic will come to an end so I can visit my loved ones again.

I haven't seen my dad in more than a year. Even though I talk to him on the phone, it just can't compare to physically spending time with him. We are both football fans, and I remember the year I took leave from work so I could go back to Malaysia and watch the World Cup final on TV with him. My dad was in such high spirits that night, showing no sign of fatigue even when the wee hours of the morning rolled around. He commented excitedly

on the players: who was good, who was bad... I was thrilled to see him so happy. I didn't have much time to spend with him, so I treasured every moment we had until I had to return to work.

Engaged in a seemingly endless cycle of eating, sleeping, and working in a foreign land makes me feel lonely. I only feel warmth when I video chat with my family at night. During such chats, we share tidbits of what is going on in our lives. Hearing my children's laughter and laughing with them is so relaxing. Those are my happiest and most laid-back moments.

Knowing that my family is safe and sound brings me peace of mind. On the other hand, if any of them falls ill or suffers from aches and pains, I'm worried and sad. I feel for my wife when I see her jaded look on the video chat screen. For years, she

has shouldered the responsibility of caring for our three children and older family members alone. She has a lot on her plate, but she is still deeply concerned about me, about whether I'm getting along well in Singapore, about whether I'm safe and healthy.

COVID has kept me from home and made me miss out on good times with my kids. In the time I've been away from home, my younger daughter has moved up to third grade; my son has grown almost as tall as I am; and my older daughter has graduated from college. They've grown so quickly over the last year and a half, I marvel at how fast time flies. It also pains me. Countless times in the quiet of the night, I missed my family so much I would have immediately flown home if I could.

Yet, as much as I miss my family, I am brought

back to reality as soon as I think of the time I'd have to spend in isolation if I were to travel to Malaysia and then back during this time—about a full month. This doesn't even take into account the money I'd have to spend on lodging, transportation, and COVID screening tests. All of that would take such a big cut from my pay I wouldn't have much left to take home.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced me to take furlough days. Some of my colleagues have been laid off. When they were asked to leave, I was on pins and needles, fervently wishing I wouldn't be the next one to follow in their footsteps. I was thankful to have the emotional support of my fellow Tzu Chi volunteers during that difficult time; Master Cheng Yen's Dharma talks and programs offered by Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV sustained me too. The Master's teachings always lift me from my gloom and help me think positively. Our world is plagued by disasters and conflicts of all kinds. Many people have it tougher than me; I'm lucky to still have a job. When we learn to count our blessings, fear loosens its grip on us.

I live in a small rental. My landlord is a warm-hearted person. He treats me like family and always invites me to eat with his family on holidays. People tend to miss home more during major holidays, and it warms me when he reaches out to me like that. My volunteer work also helps ease my homesickness. I can't participate in many Tzu Chi activities because I work on a rotation basis, but whenever my time allows, I actively pitch in. Volunteering makes me feel fulfilled.

The pandemic situation in Malaysia has been so severe recently that I can't help but worry. I'm concerned if my family has been vaccinated and if they are all safe and well. The thought—"what if they are diagnosed with the infection"—crosses my mind every so often. Living apart from them, all I can do is remind them time and again on the phone to stay home as much as possible and to be sure to use masks and maintain social distancing when they go out.

I thank the front-line medical workers in Malaysia for pulling out all the stops to take care of COVID patients in our country and bring lives back from the brink. They really help ease the minds of expatriates like me who can't be with our families during this critical time. Many Malaysians, like me, work in Singapore; we all miss our families in our home country. I know things are difficult now, but I firmly believe that the pandemic will eventually be over. I look forward to seeing the rainbow at the end of the storm. ❀



Maintaining Traditions and Protecting the Environment

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

L uermen Shengmu Temple in Tainan, southern Taiwan, is dedicated mainly to the worship of the sea goddess Mazu, one of the most revered deities on the island. The temple held a triennial religious festival from April 30 to May 2 this year. During those three days, thousands of devotees of Mazu and performance troupes from more than a hundred temples across Taiwan walked with a statue of the goddess from the temple along nearly 200 kilometers (124 miles) of road in southern Taiwan. This was to call on the power of the goddess to bestow blessings on the local people and regions.

A common sight along the route of the procession were tables bearing offerings put out by households. One could also see devout worshippers on their knees holding incense sticks. The biggest difference between this year's event and those of previous years was that every participating devotee wore a face mask, a concession to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, in the midst of the pandemic, people needed even more the solace they found in the compassionate image of Mazu.

The triennial event attracts massive crowds, who in turn produce a lot of garbage. Tzu Chi volunteers are a constant presence at the festival to help reduce the impact on the environment. Besides salvaging recyclable trash, volunteers provide reusable tableware for participants who eat at the temple's dining hall and help wash the bowls and plates after they are used to decrease single-use items. This is but one more example of volunteers seeing a need to protect the environment and doing their best to help.



Faces beaming with the joy of giving

It is a tradition for the temple to provide vegetarian meals at their dining hall for worshippers and members of the performance troupes during the three-day festival. This saves them the trouble of having to find their own food to eat. Disposable tableware used to be the mainstay at such meals—the temple did not have enough utensils or dishes for the large crowds, nor did they have enough manpower to wash the plates and bowls afterwards.

This practice might have saved time and effort, but the convenience came at a cost to the environment. In 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers noticed how much garbage was being produced by using disposable items, so they proposed to the temple board to let them provide reusable tableware for the temple to use during the event. The volunteers also promised to mobilize enough people to wash up everything afterwards. The board heartedly agreed, and volunteers have since been providing materials and extra hands for the temple meals. This thoughtful service has won wholehearted support from the temple as well as from many volunteers.

When I attended the event this year to report on the work Tzu Chi volunteers were providing during the festival, I noticed that more volunteers were washing the dishes this year than three years ago. They helped not only during the day but late into the night. It must have been tiring washing so many bowls and plates at a time, but they didn't mind the hard work at all. They knew their labor was helping prevent more harm from being done to the environment.

After the event, as I was reviewing the photos I had taken during the festival, I was moved to see every volunteer's face beaming with the joy of giving. They showed no sign of tiredness at all. I couldn't help but admire their laudable spirit of service and dedication.



Little kids in the ranks

I remember an especially endearing photo I took three years ago at the temple. It showed a one-and-a-half-year-old toddler quietly playing in a grocery cart behind a group of volunteers fully engrossed in doing the dishes. He was entertaining himself, making no ruckus whatsoever, as if he knew the adults were busy. When I went to the festival this year, I found to my delight that the toddler was now old enough to help the adults wash the dishes. His older brother was there helping out too. The two youngsters are the grandsons of volunteer Zhou Shu-ru (周淑茹). The older one, Huang Pin-sheng (黃品升), was six, and the younger one, Huang Pin-cheng (黃品澄), was four and a half. They knew their grandmother was volunteering at the temple during the festival, so each day when they woke in the morning and from their afternoon nap they asked their mom to take them to the temple to help out.

The little boys fit in very well, each wearing an apron and a face mask, as they sat alongside the adults rinsing the bowls and plates. They did an impressive job, keeping pace with the adults. The younger one was so absorbed in his task that he didn't even notice it when his mask had slipped down his nose.

Seeing the two little "bodhisattvas" was like seeing two seeds of goodness sprouting. The volunteers on-site praised the boys, saying: "Such good kids!" The enthusiastic work from the boys inspired the volunteers too, who in turn worked harder washing the dishes. They said to each other: "These kids will make us look bad if they are working harder than we are! We mustn't lose it to the kids."



Everyone can play a part

Aside from free meals, sweet mung bean soup—a popular dessert in Taiwan—was also offered on-site. Due to the pandemic, paper cups were used to serve the dessert this year. Tzu Chi volunteers helped dish out the soup and hand it to each recipient, gently saying, “Here you go, and thank you. Next time, please consider bringing your own container for the soup [to help reduce the use of single-use items].” Off to one side, some volunteers were rinsing used paper cups before bagging them for recycling. This was to prevent the residue in the cups from going sour and emitting bad smells. Seeing what the volunteers were doing, some devotees also rinsed their own cups before disposing of them.

With their own actions, the volunteers hoped to inspire the public to give some thought before they threw away their garbage. If a piece of garbage can be recycled, have it properly recycled. And, out of consideration for the volunteers who will handle the recyclables later, please clean and rinse a recyclable item before disposing of it.





A cleaner environment

The religious event this year attracted nearly 10,000 attendees. Everyone's attention was on the procession of believers following the deity Mazu and the colorfully costumed performance troupes. Everyone was caught up in the festive mood. However, every time such an event comes to an end and the crowds have left, the ground is invariably littered with spent firecrackers and garbage. This triennial festival was no exception.

Tzu Chi volunteers remain behind when others leave, continuing to work for the environment as they clean up. They can be seen sorting through trash cans standing at various corners of the temple or through piles of bagged garbage to salvage recyclables. They pick out piece after piece of trash that can be recycled, not wanting anything that can be reused to end up in an incinerator or a landfill. The volunteers collected nearly three tons of recycling during and after the event.

The festival demonstrates the verve and vivacity of Taiwan's folk beliefs. People paying respect to and praying for the blessings of deities at such events is a vital part of the local traditional culture. But the festivities would be more pleasing to the deities if more attention was paid to environmental protection. Participants could, for example, avoid littering, properly dispose of their garbage, or bring their own water bottles or food containers to reduce the amount of disposable items. Without a doubt, any deity would smile at such eco-friendly action and the cleaner environment that would result. ☸

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Guatemala

Many underprivileged people in Guatemala experience difficulty in making a livelihood, which has only been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to a request for aid from the municipal government of Palencia, Tzu Chi volunteers held a food distribution in the town on October 3, 2021. That same day, volunteers also donated medical and personal protective equipment to local firefighters to help safeguard them from the threat of the coronavirus.

The distribution was held at the newly inaugurated Plaza Bicentenario in Palencia. Guadalupe Alberto Reyes Aguilar, the mayor, personally directed municipal workers, police officers, and firefighters to lay out 500 sets of relief items on the plaza in neat order.

The event started with a simple but dignified ceremony, during which the mayor gave a short, moving speech. "I know poverty sometimes makes us feel sad," he said. "It dampens our spirits and even makes us afraid. But even under the

Government workers in the town of Palencia, Guatemala, arrange relief items in orderly rows in the town's Plaza Bicentenario for a Tzu Chi distribution. The distribution, held on October 3, 2021, was to help local people affected by the pandemic. YE WU LI-ZHU

worst circumstances we must not lose hope, faith, and a heart of charity." He then went on to thank Tzu Chi for being a long-standing friend to people in the town. He said the foundation had first aided Palencia's residents in 2004, and that not only residents of Palencia but people in other regions of Guatemala had received help from Tzu Chi too. "I invite all of you who are benefiting from the distribution to thank the foundation's volunteers in their country's language. They are from the other end of the Earth [Taiwan]. 'Xie xie' is 'thank you' in Chinese. Let's convey to them our respect and gratitude. Xie xie!"

As typical in a Tzu Chi distribution, participants were invited to drop money into coin banks

held out by volunteers to help other needy people. This was to inspire love in everyone's heart. The mayor was the first to donate. Many other people deposited their spare change into the coin banks too. Tzu Chi had been helping people in the town for a long time. Many aid recipients pulled at volunteers' sleeves to say "thank you" to them.

Five hundred families received rice, cooking oil, sugar, pasta, multigrain powder, and biscuits. Volunteers also donated medical and personal protective equipment to local firefighters at the event. The donated items included oximeters, blood pressure gauges, thermometers—ten each—and 1,000 pairs of medical gloves.

Paraguay

Tzu Chi volunteers in Ciudad del Este, the second largest city in Paraguay, held a regular monthly distribution at the local Tzu Chi office on September 20, 2021, benefiting 50 needy families. The aid was tailored to the families' needs; some received assorted food items, some rent subsidies, others medicine, etc.

Analdo had been an aid recipient since 2016. He arrived at the office to collect two months' worth of cervical cancer medications for his wife. He thanked Tzu Chi for the medicine that helped his wife better fight her disease. Andres, another aid recipient, was studying to become a doctor. He understood the pain of people too poor to afford medical treatment, and he wanted to help. Tzu Chi has awarded him scholarships since 2018 to help him fulfill his dream. "If I become a doctor, I'll do my utmost to help those most in need," he said. Rodrigo, 18, came to the office to get food for his family. He was accompanied by his mother, who was supporting five children alone. Rodrigo suffered from presbyopia, an eye condition that normally affects older people. Besides getting food for his family, he received a pair of custom-made glasses to help him see better.

In addition to helping those 50 families, volunteers visited 12 more in September to deliver aid to them. One of the families lived in Domingo Martínez de Irala. The breadwinner of this family made a living by fishing but he could barely support his wife and five children on his modest income. Volunteer Silvio Ayala Meira had learned during an earlier visit that the children in the family were sleeping on two tattered sponge sheets stacked together and decided to help. He and other volunteers delivered two beds and mattresses, five blankets, and some clothes to the family



A man received a wheelchair at a distribution held at the Tzu Chi office in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, on September 20. Fifty families received aid tailored to their needs on that day. CAI QI-RU

on September 10. The mother, Mercedes Castro, was extremely grateful, especially for the beds. Her children had never slept in a real bed before. The young ones were overjoyed.

The children warmly and enthusiastically waved goodbye to the volunteers when it was time for them to leave. The volunteers embarked on their journey home, their hearts brimming with joy at seeing the kids' happiness.

The United States

Torrential rains brought by Hurricane Ida caused the Elizabeth River in Elizabeth, New Jersey, to overflow on September 1, 2021, flooding streets in Elizabeth and devastating the Oakwood Plaza Apartments that abutted the river. The local government responded by housing displaced residents in five hotels. Tzu Chi New Jersey held four aid distributions from September 25 to October 9 at four of the hotels, helping 141 families.

The first distribution took place at Embassy Suites by Hilton on September 25. Twenty Tzu Chi volunteers worked with 13 Red Cross volunteers to serve participating families. Volunteer Zhang Weiguang (張維光) kicked off the event by reading a consolation letter from Dharma Master Cheng Yen, then led everyone in singing the Tzu Chi song "Love and Care" to pray for peace for the world.

Pamela Brown, a survivor, burst into tears when she learned that she was receiving a cash card worth 600 U.S. dollars from Tzu Chi. She took a volunteer's hands in hers and repeatedly thanked the foundation. She said that though she was in a low point in her life, Tzu Chi's help had brought her hope. She said she would pray for the volunteers.

Volunteers respectfully handed over every cash card while conveying to the recipients the best wishes from Master Cheng Yen and every Tzu Chi volunteer. They told the victims that they were not alone and that Tzu Chi would always be there for them as long as they needed help. In addition to a cash card, every family received a box of face masks and a Tzu Chi blanket. The blankets were very soft to the touch, so recipients were greatly surprised when they learned that they were made from recycled plastic bottles. Volunteers took the opportunity to explain to them Tzu Chi's environmental efforts, hoping to help raise awareness of the importance of environmental protection.

Volunteers' efforts to promote environmental protection resonated with Nilaja Watkins, an elementary school teacher. She received Tzu Chi's aid at the distribution conducted at APA Hotel Woodbridge on October 2. Watkins's rented apart-

Volunteers explain to flood victims how to use the cash cards provided by Tzu Chi at a distribution on September 25. Heavy downpours triggered by Hurricane Ida flooded streets in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in early September, destroying homes and submerging cars. Tzu Chi helped victims by distributing cash cards, blankets, and face masks. GAO SHOU-YONG



ment, located in the basement, had been completely ruined in the floods and was no longer fit for habitation. Even so, she counted herself among the lucky ones—at least she had survived the disaster. Even though she was going through a difficult time, she knew she was faring better than many others. She expressed thanks for the help and care from Tzu Chi, and said she would share the story of the Tzu Chi blanket with her colleagues and students to inspire eco-friendly action.

"I thought it was just a typical rainstorm. Who was to know that my car and house would be gone when I woke up in the morning," said a victim. There was a lot of helplessness and sadness behind this simple statement. It's impossible to stop life's impermanence from happening, but humanity's saving grace is love and care. With love and care come hope and strength to carry on.

Canada

Amidst a light drizzle on September 12, 2021, about 60 Tzu Chi volunteers in Surrey, in the province of British Columbia, gathered at a parking lot near the Guildford Mall. They were coming together with a mission: to clean up the streets near the mall. Tzu Chi volunteers in Surrey help clean up the streets once a month, from May to September—and they've been doing it for 25 years, ever since Tzu Chi Surrey joined the city's Adopt A Street program in 1997.

Doug McCallum was the mayor of the city when Tzu Chi Surrey joined the program 25 years ago, and he joined them at that time in cleaning up the streets. As it happens, McCallum is also the current mayor, so he joined the volunteers again on September 12. He commended Tzu Chi volunteers for their 25 years of dedication in making Surrey a cleaner and more beautiful city.

Before the participants set out to clean up the streets near the mall, volunteer Guan Hui-mei (管惠美) led everyone in doing warm-up exercises to the tune of the song "A Clean Earth." Then volunteer Chen Jun-hui (陳俊輝) reminded everyone to watch out for their safety when cleaning up the streets and not to pick up hazardous objects.

The sight of the team of people bending down to pick up garbage around the neighborhood moved many citizens. Passing motorists honked their car horns and gave them thumbs-up in a show of support and appreciation. Pedestrians and people waiting at bus stops hollered to the volunteers: "Good job!"



Doug McCallum (left), the mayor of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada, cleans streets in the city with Tzu Chi volunteers on September 12, 2021. WU QUN-FANG

Cai Jin-zhi (蔡金枝) was one of the volunteers who had joined the activity 25 years ago. "The Tzu Chi Surrey office had just been established," she recalled. "Every month, as many as 70 to 80 people would come for the event. We made an impressive, long procession as we picked up trash along the streets." She feels honored to be a part of Tzu Chi Surrey as it has grown over the years. She expressed hope that she would still be in the procession, cleaning the streets, 25 years from now.

"Keeping services like ours going for 25 years is quite a feat," said volunteer Wu Mei-lian (吳玫漣). "It's our duty as citizens to help our city stay clean. I hope our cleanup event will continue for many more years to come." The other volunteers felt the same desire.

The entire event lasted for more than two hours. Volunteers set off for home afterward with a spring in their step after leaving the streets clean and tidy.

Myanmar

Tzu Chi Myanmar has been helping vulnerable people in the country weather the economic impact of the pandemic since April 2020. In July this year, a third wave of the coronavirus erupted in Myanmar. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers donated medical equipment and supplies to local

hospitals and isolation centers to help battle the crisis. In the process, they learned from government officials that the pandemic had caused many factories in Yangon to shut down. Many people lost their jobs as a result. Inflation had further added insult to injury. The officials expressed hope that Tzu Chi could help tide affected families over this trying time.

One of the areas hit hardest was Seikkyi Kanaungto Township. There were few employment opportunities in the town, so most residents supported themselves with odd jobs. Others traveled to and fro each day to an industrial zone in nearby Hlaingthaya Township to work. The pandemic had greatly strained the finances of many families in the area. With the assistance of local government workers, volunteers quickly obtained lists of families in need of help. A distribution was subsequently held in late September to aid the families.

Volunteer U Kyaw Khin (林銘慶) mobilized ten of his employees to help with the distribution so that older volunteers wouldn't have to venture out for the event and run the risk of COVID infection. Along with a Tzu Chi staffer and 15 young volunteers from the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association, U Kyaw Khin and his employees set out to Seikkyi Kanaungto on September 23 to launch the distribution.

Seikkyi Kanaungto Township consists of nine communities, some of which are inaccessible by car due to a river. After meeting with the leaders of the communities, the Tzu Chi team decided to go personally to those communities accessible by car to distribute aid. As for those communities unreachable by car, their respective leaders were entrusted with the responsibility of transferring relief goods from Tzu Chi into the hands of the needy in their neighborhoods.

A total of 6,700 families in the nine communities received aid from the foundation on September 23 and 26. Each family received a 24-kilogram (53-pound) bag of rice and a one-liter (0.26-gallon) bottle of cooking oil.

Daw Sanay Ma, an aid recipient, was a new mother with a two-month-old baby. Her husband put food on the table by doing odd jobs, but the pandemic had made it difficult for him to earn enough money to get by. Sometimes he'd skip meals so that his wife could have enough to eat. A neighbor took pity on them and lent him a motor scooter to use as a taxi to make some money. He had worked for four days as a taxi driver now, earning 3,000 kyat (US\$1.60) a day. "We've never



People living in Seikkyi Kanaungto Township, Yangon, Myanmar, line up to receive rice and cooking oil from Tzu Chi. The pandemic had hurt many families' livelihoods in the town.

MG MYINT THU

received rice or cooking oil from a charity organization before," said Daw Sanay Ma. "We're very thankful to Tzu Chi."

Mar Lar Thwe is a single mother with two young children. She made ends meet by selling food she made herself in her community. Business was bad because of the pandemic. She had had no capital to support her small business for some time and had been relying on neighbors to scrape by. Sometimes she was even forced to go hungry. The rice from Tzu Chi couldn't have come at a better time. She planned to use the money saved from buying rice for her family to restart her business.

Indonesia

A fire broke out in Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, on October 7, 2021, destroying 61 houses. Volunteers

quickly inspected damage in the disaster area, then followed up with a distribution. Ten volunteers arrived at the disaster area on October 11 and handed out 120 sets of relief items to victims.

According to Arif Hidayat, a neighborhood chief, 19 fire trucks arrived at the fire scene after the conflagration broke out, and it took three hours for the fire to be extinguished. "Fortunately, no one was killed," said the neighborhood chief.

Anna (a pseudonym), 58, was away from home working when the fire broke out. Her building, which she and her family shared with five other households, was burned to the ground. None of the residents had been able to salvage anything.

Anna was happy to receive the aid items from Tzu Chi, which included blankets, toiletry items, water buckets, etc. "Thank our good Lord, Allah," she said. "The things you gave us are exactly what we need. Thank you so much. I'll pray for everyone who helped us."

"I hope the victims can feel how many people care for them," said volunteer Gao Kuang-bao (高鑛寶), "and that the aid we distributed will ease their burden."



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In life there is no turning back; face adversity as it comes with courage.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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