

Tzu Chi's Mission of Charity

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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At that time, Taiwan was just beginning to make the transition from a rural, agricultural society to an urban, industrialized one. The government did not have much money and the social safety net was not in place yet, so there were poor, sick and lonely people everywhere, especially in Hualien.

Master Cheng Yen began her work by asking each of the thirty followers, mostly housewives, to save fifty cents (US\$0.02) from their daily grocery money. She fashioned little savings banks from pieces of bamboo and asked them to put the money in the banks before going to the market each day.

"Why should we save fifty cents every day?" the disciples asked. "Isn't it easier just to save fifteen dollars per month?"

The Master shook her head, "It's not the same. If you save once a month, then you only show your compassion once a month. Even though the fifty cents you save daily is not of great value, you accumulate the spirit of helping and loving others every day."

In the first month, they only collected US\$18. In the first year, Tzu Chi assisted 15 families, or 31 people, and distributed a total of US\$435. Thus a group of housewives carrying their grocery bags wrote down the first page in the history of Tzu Chi.



At the beginning, there were rumors, doubts and misunderstanding about the Master, because she was thin and had problems even feeding herself. To many people, carrying our charity work was beyond her ability. However, the Master compassionately tolerated all of this and led her disciples through countless obstacles. For over 40 years, she has been providing happiness, educating the rich, assisting the poor, and eliminating their suffering. As end of 2008, more than 146,000 people receive Tzu Chi's long-term support. The strength of the Master's convictions and actions has touched the heart of many people.

Tzu Chi's charity mission not only includes assisting the poor, but also providing emergency relief. The mission includes: (1) long-term financial assistance to low-income families, (2) long-term rice or material assistance to low-income families, (3) income assistance for purchasing medicine, (4) medical assistance, (5) disaster relief, and (6) funeral assistance for the lonely and the poor. At the end of every year, in addition to the regular financial assistance, Tzu Chi also distributes New Year gift money, supplies for the holiday and new winter clothing. On the same day, Tzu Chi members also provide a vegetarian banquet and enjoy the meal with these people. In these ways, Tzu Chi hopes to bring warmth to the hearts of these poor, old, or lonely people.

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The structure of the charity mission has diversified, as society has become more complex. Many rich people involved with the mission have been enabled to reveal their love and altruism. More and more people have participated in the work of Tzu Chi. In the early days, charity work focused on material assistance, but now it has turned more to spiritual counseling and care. Besides providing long-term materials and spiritual comfort to needy families, we also visit veteran's homes, jails, and nursing homes for retarded people once or twice a month. Through massaging and feeding the elderly or the disabled, sharing personal experiences, or engaging in resources recycling, we intend to soothe suffering hearts and to transform every dark corner into a pure field of blessing.

Untill today, the charity mission has spread from Hualien to every part of the planet. Material assistance has been elevated to spiritual fulfillment. Our care has expanded from a few families to whole organizations, in order to support all those in the world who suffer. We believe that the purification of people's minds and harmony in society are not far away.