

## Volunteers Hold Distribution, Year-End Blessing Ceremony in Northeast Italy

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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In late October, Tzu Chi volunteers from three countries held a distribution event and a year-end ceremony of blessings for the victims of two strong earthquakes that struck northeast Italy in May last year. Those who took part were greatly touched by the love and care shown to them.

On May 20, 2012 an earthquake of 5.7 magnitude struck the Emilia-Romagna region, about 22 miles north of Bologna, killing seven people, On May 29, a second earthquake, measuring 5.8, struck the same area, causing an additional 20 deaths and widespread damage, especially to buildings already weakened by the first quake. One of the cities worst affected was Finale Emilia, whose community center collapsed.

In July 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers from France and Germany began an assessment of the damage there and, in December, held a winter distribution. Since then, they have continued to care for the quake survivors. In late October this year, the volunteers, helped by those from Italy, returned to the city to hold the two events.



On October 25, they organized a meal and transport subsidies distribution. The earthquake damaged many schools, forcing students to travel long distances to attend class. The additional lunch money and transport costs became a burden for their families; the subsidies are extremely helpful to them, especially those who have come to the city to work from elsewhere.

During the distribution, older students shared Jing Si Aphorisms and young children gave drawings, with smiles on their faces; the pictures showed their sturdy homes. The volunteers could see on their faces how the happiness they lost has come back. With the residents, the volunteers sang an Italian version of the Prayer song. It touched their hearts and the warmth will stay with them through the cold winter.



The next day, the volunteers organized two year-end ceremony of blessings in a temporary community center. Nearly 50 volunteers came long distances, from France and Germany as well as Italy. The local government organized transport for those residents who have been forced to live far away. The residents have become familiar with Tzu Chi, even though Buddhism is a religion different to their own, and feel comfortable taking part in its rituals. A local entrepreneur was invited to help organize the event; and the city mayor himself took part.

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Although the equipment was simple and the venue was a tent, the ceremony was full of blessings from the volunteers.

They walked to every guest, bowed and offered their blessings & red packets that symbolize wisdom and good fortune; everyone was touched to know that these blessings came from Taiwan. They watched a video in which Master Cheng Yen expressed her blessing to everyone; through the sub-titles, her warm, soft tone touched their hearts.

In total, more than 800 people attended the two events, which were presented in both Mandarin and Italian.

Reported by Tzu Chi documentation volunteers