

Tzu Chi in France Celebrates Buddha Day for First Time at Home

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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This year members of Tzu Chi in France came together to celebrate Buddha's Day and held the event for the first time at the branch in Paris, capital of France. The second Sunday of May is a very special day, as there are three meaningful occasions that fall on that day: Mother's Day, Buddha Day, and Tzu Chi Day. Members of the foundation around the world celebrate on this day.

This year was a special case; the members in France could not hold the event at the normal venue which belongs to one of their partners. The volunteers looked for another site but could not find a suitable one. After lengthy discussions, they decided to see this as a good opportunity to hold the event at their own branch.

Because it cannot accommodate many people, this constituted a very big challenge. They decided to hold several ceremonies, the first one early for branch members, and then open the room to public, so that everyone could come in and take part. In this way, there would not be so many people in the room at the same time. For the local members, this had an advantage – it saved the cost of renting another place and the trouble of moving the statues and the cleaning equipment.



It was the first such celebration in the branch. The branch CEO Zheng Lung thanked everyone for attending and welcomed everyone to the spiritual home in the country. Mr. Chen Shyh-Kwei, Director of the Overseas Community Affairs Council of the Executive Yuan, was on a visit to France and specially arranged to take part. Lu Qing-lung, who always attends the event, expressed his thanks for Tzu Chi's presence in France and said how much he admired its spirit of helping everyone in need in the world, regardless of their race.

Before the start of the ceremony, many volunteers brought their own bamboo bank; everyone was happy to donate the love they had accumulated each day.

At the start of the ceremony, the members entered the room and bathed the statue of the Buddha. Regardless of their race or religion, everyone performed this rite with sincerity. Lin Zong-peng, a volunteer from Germany, made a special journey in order to be present. Yu Huai-yi and Cai Rui-yu took a two-hour flight from Norway in order to participate. Yu said: "This event is held every year and is a very joyful occasion. The Paris branch is the spiritual home of the Tzu Chi members in Europe. So, of course, I had to come. The branch is small in area, but we can see how enthusiastic and hard working the members are; this inspires a spirit of co-operation and working together."

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Among the visitors was Jean-Marc Auguet, who works for a French recycling company. He believes that the great love and environmental protection of Tzu Chi are very close to the organization and philosophy of his own company; he also feels that the Buddha Bathing ceremony is very uplifting. He believes that the world is very chaotic and needs organizations like Tzu Chi.



Francoise Mallier is a local volunteer who has taken part in the foundation's activities for more than six years; every Wednesday she comes to the branch for language exchange. She herself is a Protestant but, each time she participates in Tzu Chi, she feels that everyone regards her as part of the family. During her visit, she said: "I am a French Protestant, not a Catholic. So, in France, we account for only one per cent of believers. Since I started coming to Tzu Chi, I have met many Buddhists and have been accepted by everyone. I have been able to express my expertise in Tzu Chi, which has made me very happy."

Zhab Shu-e is a member who has lived in France for 38 years, after arriving as a refugee from Cambodia, and is 79 this year. She has been a member for 20 years. After she met Master Cheng Yen during a visit to Taiwan in 2004, she was very moved and started to take part in the foundation's activities after her return to France.

During the event, some of the equipment malfunctioned, causing a disturbance. But the problem was dealt with and the branch held a solemn and complete ceremony to wash the Buddha.

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Note: The second Sunday of May is Mother's Day in Taiwan. In 2000, it was designated by Taiwan's government as the official Buddha Day in Taiwan. In Tzu Chi, it became the official Global Tzu Chi Day following Tzu Chi's 30th anniversary. (Tzu Chi was founded on March 24, 1966 on the lunar calendar.)