

Frequently Asked Questions about Tzu Chi

1. What is Tzu Chi?

Tzu Chi means 'Compassion Relief'¹ in Chinese. Through great compassion for those who are suffering, we can relieve suffering, be it our own or that of others.

*"When others hurt, I feel their pain;
when others suffer, I offer compassion."*

Tzu Chi Foundation was established in 1966 by a Buddhist nun, Venerable Master Cheng Yen, in the rural, poor eastern coast of Taiwan initially offering food and medical relief for the poor. As she herself lived a simple, austere life, she encouraged her supporters to save equivalent NT\$0.50 (or, US\$0.02) a day in the belief that even if we are poor, we can help others. Eventually, she and her supporters saved enough to offer food relief to the local poor. Thus, through the gradual and daily accumulation of our efforts and through the collective love of many, together we can help others. Thus, from the loving heart of one springs infinite hearts of love.

A daily donation is our daily prayer to help others. By saving each day we remind ourselves each day of our resolution to help those in need. We put our love into practice each day, not just once a year or once a month.

We should not think that we need money to help others, nor should we ever discount what appears to be a small gesture. Even children and college students, the elderly, or even those who are physically disabled, can help others. Giving is not the privilege of the rich; it is the privilege of the sincere. The truly rich are those who are rich in love.

Master Cheng Yen believes that each person has a pure heart of love, and that by inspiring such love; we can alleviate the suffering and turmoil in our society and eliminate disasters.

2. What are Tzu Chi's main areas of work?

Today, Tzu Chi's major missions are Charity, Medicine, Education, Humanistic Culture, as well as cross-cutting areas of Disaster Relief, Bone Marrow Donation, Environmental Protection, and Community Volunteerism. Charity and Medicine address the physical suffering of poverty and illness, while Education and Humanistic Culture address the mental and spiritual suffering that manifests in our world. Moreover, the Missions of Charity and Medicine are interlinked—those who fall ill can become poor from health care costs and missed work, while the poor cannot afford and may be denied life-saving health care.

*In this world,
there is no one I do not love,
no one I do not trust, and
no one I cannot forgive.*

¹ Some have said that "compassion relief" is grammatically incorrect and that we offer "compassionate relief" or "compassion and relief". Some volunteers value the relief that arises from compassion—that is, the simple thought of unconditional compassion—to be as important as any physical act of relief.

² The term "humanistic culture" is translated from the Chinese "人文" and does not refer to "humanist philosophy".

Mission of Charity—helping the poor, educating the rich. In the Mission of Charity, Tzu Chi volunteers around the world find local social-work cases and help them through the existing social-work system, filling in gaps wherever they may be. We hope that volunteers discover the joy of giving and helping others. Moreover, we help charity recipients to stand up on their own and hope that by being spiritually rich in love, they, too, can help others.

Mission of Medicine—human-centered care, patients as teachers. Mission of Medicine consists of six hospitals planted in underserved areas of Taiwan, as well as medical outreach programs in rural areas. In the United States, we have free clinics in Los Angeles and Honolulu, and other offices across the country hold mobile medical clinics or "Free Clinics". Tzu Chi also holds medical outreach programs in other countries. Our trained medical volunteers offer physical, mental, and spiritual support to patients, completing the Four Wholes—*Whole process of illness, Whole person, Whole family, and Whole team*. Moreover, we hope that medical care will treat the person, not just the illness, and that we always view patients as our teachers.

Mission of Education—educating virtue, cultivating courtesy. Over 1989-2000, Tzu Chi established a comprehensive education system in Taiwan, covering pre-school, elementary school, middle and high school, university, and graduate school. Tzu Chi also offers community/extension education programs for adults and children. Its core values are "Love, Compassion, Joy, Giving/Equanimity" and "Reverence for Life". With *Character Education, Lifestyle Education, and Whole-Person Education* as objectives, we believe that formal education should not just train skills or increase knowledge, but also inspire the unlimited potential of human goodness and cultivate values of virtue and courtesy that are not muddled in this confused era.

Mission of Humanistic Culture—leaving a legacy of model character. The Mission of Humanistic Culture consists of the phenomena of social media to serve as a witness to the cycles of love and goodness, and a historical record of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, reaching out to all corners of the world. Today we have newspapers, magazines, books, music, radio station, websites, and Da Ai (Great Love) TV, a global satellite television that we hope is a pure stream of love that circles the globe. We carry the responsibility of honest and truthful reporting through tangible social media to communicate immaterial human affection and love.

Over the years, four cross-cutting areas have developed in light of the needs of our society:

Disaster Relief requires urgent action, starting from the immediate care to longer-term rebuilding, reconstruction, and recovery. Its five Disaster Relief principles are *Direct Relief, Priority, Respect, Pragmatic, Gratitude* (by Volunteers), and *Timely Relief*, while the Three Nos are *No Politics, No Religion, and No Propaganda*. Unconditional Love has no boundaries, and makes no distinctions of race, religion, or ethnicity.

Environmental Protection encourages us to use hands not just for applause, but for protecting the environment. Through recycling, one can convert trash to gold and gold into love. If we each do our part to reduce our carbon footprint through frugal living, just as our forebears did, we can protect our environment and slow the pace of global warming. In our interconnected world, let us walk gently on our earth so the earth will not hurt.

Bone Marrow Donation was established and promoted in Taiwan by Tzu Chi's volunteer network in the belief that we can save someone's life without harming our own. At one time it was the largest Asian registry and the largest private (non-government) registry in the world.

Community Volunteerism is about realizing the mutual concern and care in our local communities. We need not go far to help those in need and suffering. Together we can create a society filled with warmth and love.

3. Most other NGOs have one focus. Why does Tzu Chi cover so many areas?

Compassion and relief are needed in all interconnected spheres of life. We believe that the organization's many areas of work do not detract our effectiveness, but in fact enables and increases it. Many NGOs in the East are systems-focused (rather than of single focus) and "holistic".

4. It seems like everyone here is Chinese or Asian. I don't speak Chinese. Is this a Chinese organization?

Tzu Chi was founded in Taiwan and has spread around the world largely through Chinese-speaking immigrant and diaspora networks. Consequently, given these Chinese-speaking origins in Taiwan, many of the core values and teachings were originally in Chinese. For those who wish to learn Chinese, this may be an opportunity to practice it!

We hope that the spirit of Great Love is not to be hindered by language barriers. We now offer teachings and reports in several different languages, such as English, Spanish, Indonesian, Thai, Japanese, Zulu, Arabic, etc.

5. I'm Christian. Can I become a Tzu Chi volunteer?

Of course! The spirit of Great Love transcends all religions, race, country, and affiliation. Tzu Chi has offices in all six continents with volunteers of many religions and ethnicities. In Indonesia, Turkey, and Jordan, we have Muslim volunteers. In the Philippines, we have Catholic volunteers. In South Africa we have Christian volunteers. In the US, volunteers reflect the diversity in the country and come from a variety of backgrounds including Christian, Jewish, atheist, agnostic, and others. Love has no labels.

6. Here I see that you have images of the Buddha. I'm not sure I feel comfortable with bowing to it. Is Buddha considered to be God?

Buddha was not a god or God; he was a human being. Buddha means "Awakened One" or "Enlightened One" in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit. That is, he was awakened to our true nature which encompasses universal love and compassion, and infinite wisdom and peace. When we bow to the Buddha, we are bowing to this potential and spirit of awakening of each person, including ourselves, our neighbors, and every single sentient being.

With the same intention and respect when we bow to our fellow human being, we bow to the Buddha. Those who do not feel comfortable bowing are not obliged in any way to do so. Volunteers never feel compelled or pressured to do anything that does not make them comfortable. Always be at ease and without worries!

7. Is Tzu Chi Buddhist? If so, do you have meditation/prayer sessions or scripture classes? I'd like to learn about Buddhism.

Tzu Chi was founded on Buddhist values by a Buddhist nun to put the teachings of Buddha into action and into our daily lives. The teachings of Buddha are alive and intended to be lived and practiced, not simply read or chanted. Our action can be transformed into meditation as long as we are mindful and our minds are peaceful. When our minds are calm, we can cultivate contentment, gratitude, understanding and empathy, and a big magnanimous heart.

In many Tzu Chi offices, we offer reading, study, and discussion groups, largely on Tzu Chi materials as well as key Mahayana Buddhist scripture (sutra)—*The Sutra of Infinite (or Immeasurable) Meaning* (無量義經) and *The Wonderful-Dharma Lotus Sutra* (妙法蓮華經). Please check with your local Tzu Chi office for more information.

8. What is a Bodhisattva? Tzu Chi people keep talking about them.

These are those filled with universal and unconditional great love and compassion to benefit sentient beings, spiritual heroes of sentient beings. Each person who has compassion and helps those who are in need is a Bodhisattva. Just like a Bodhisattva of Compassion (Avalokitesvara or Guan Yin Pusa 觀世音菩薩) has a thousand hands and eyes to reach out to calls for help, we too hope to emulate this and respond to any call, big or small, for help.

9. What are Still Thoughts (Jing Si Aphorisms)?

These are short pithy sayings taught by Venerable Master Cheng Yen to a particular person under a particular circumstance. They have been extracted and removed from that context, but are to be applied for our daily lives. Some of us think of Still Thoughts as "Buddhism 101" or "Buddhism for Beginners". They are so simple that sometimes there doesn't seem to be anything particularly "Buddhist" about it! Here are a few sayings in English:

Don't let criticism dampen our motivation.

Do not underestimate our ability, for humans have unlimited potential.

Being angry is punishing oneself for the mistakes of others.

Gratitude dissolves all inner grievances and awakens our compassion.

This year Still Thoughts is celebrating its 20th anniversary. They have now been translated into different languages. Please contact your local Tzu Chi office if you'd like to get a copy or help translate them. Or visit <http://www.jingsi.com.tw> for further information.

10. What's up with the Tzu Chi uniform?

We know that our uniforms are distinctive and we share pride in it. Uniforms make it visible to the general public that we are a service organization. We wear our uniform with confidence that we offer services with the utmost professionalism and service. In many parts of the world, Tzu Chi's uniform is synonymous with timely relief and care. In NYC during 9/11 and in other parts of the world where Tzu Chi relief work is ongoing, Tzu Chi uniforms were recognized as "Blue Angels". In certain parts of South Africa, people recognize the Tzu Chi uniform and will protect them, not mug them.

Uniforms also reduce the human signs and differences in clothing, these human appearances of fashion. As our volunteers come from all walks of life, by wearing uniforms, we eliminate these distinctions. The simplicity of the uniform actually lets ones "identity" and "personality" shine through.

If you accept the need for a uniform, then the particularities of the uniform are symbolic. The work-clothes uniform that we usually wear is unisex—blue shirt with white collar, white pants, and white shoes. The blue shirt symbolizes the expansiveness of the sky and the white symbolizes the clouds. Just as clouds of suffering can come and go, the sky as always remains undisturbed.

11. Why are some volunteers wearing gray shirts, some light blue shirts, and some dark blue shirts?

The different colored shirts reflect different kinds of volunteers. The light-blue shirts are for college volunteers. There are lighter blue shirts for middle and high school. There are green/blue shirts for teachers. There are gray shirts for new volunteers. There are dark blue shirts for certified volunteers called "Commissioners" who are committed to Tzu Chi's mission. We also have other uniforms for different occasions. Certified female volunteers wear a long blue dress called "Eight-fold Righteous Path" while working, and in formal ceremonies, they wear the traditional Chinese "qipao". Certified male volunteers wear a western suit with tie.

12. I don't have much time these days to help. I'd like to help but I'm not sure how.

We are grateful for your interest! Let us light the inexhaustible lamp of love in our hearts. Every little effort and help counts, just like a drop of water can accumulate to a river.

*Seize every opportunity to do good,
for once it passes,
that moment is lost and may be too late.*

13. What Tzu Chi service activities are there in my local area? Which activity can I help with?

There are no end of activities that need your help—social-work cases, nursing home visits, health fairs, fundraising fairs and drives, food bank volunteers, soup kitchens, recycling, Chinese-language academy teaching character education, translation, and audiovisual and multimedia work. Never discount the value of any good deed, small or big.

Through these activities, and mindfulness, we learn. Through learning, we awaken to our innate goodness. **Just do it!**

For more information, please go to www.tzuchi.org. To see the full list of Tzu Chi USA offices, please go to <http://www.us.tzuchi.org/usa/home.nsf/contact/index>.

*A field of blessings invites all good people.
Countless heart lotuses bloom, creating the world of Tzu Chi.*

福田一方邀天下善士 心蓮萬蕊造慈濟世界

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