

Volunteers in Philippines Go Vegetarian

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Two Filipino mothers, after joining Tzu Chi, decided to become vegetarian and bring their families with them.

Lornita is a resident of Malanday, a suburb of the capital Manila; her district received substantial help from Tzu Chi foundation and its volunteers last autumn when it was inundated by flood waters. She attended a volunteer training session, where she tried a vegetarian risotto. “I realized that, far from being bland, vegetarian food could be delicious. At the session, I saw a film about vegetarianism and told my family to practice it. It can help to keep you free of illness, like high blood pressure.” This is a common malady among Filipinos – so going without meat is good for your health.

The Philippines is a country of meat-eaters. If you are a vegetarian and walk around the food stalls at lunchtime in Manila, you are in for a hard time. All the stalls use animal fat – avoiding meat is not only a matter of buying plants; you must also purchase the cooking oil with care. “The family used to love eating meat,” said Lornita. “But, now I am a Tzu Chi volunteer, I have decided to follow its precept not to kill living things. I decided to make this change a month ago. Fresh cabbage stir-fried with a little vegetable oil – this brings out the original flavour of the food.”



"Animals would ask us not to kill them"

Following Lornita's footsteps is Rebecca Ancheta, also a resident of Malanday who is training to be a volunteer. “I decided to become a vegetarian for health reasons. I am learning to respect living things. Animal lives are the same as human ones. If they could speak, they would say: ‘do not kill us’. So I do not want to eat them.”

Rebecca cooks three meals a day for the 13 people in her family. So, when she switched to vegetarianism, all her family went with her. A typical meal is calabash and boiled rice. Even her meat-loving grandson Errol has become vegetarian. He has discovered that a meal can taste even better without meat.

One drawback is that, with the rise in food prices, some vegetables are more expensive than meat. In spite of this, Lornita, Rebecca and others are sticking to their principles and the precept of not killing. Their common goal is to do good and not to do evil.