

Tzu Chi Collegiate Association Celebrates 20th Anniversary

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From December 24 to 30, the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association celebrated its 20th anniversary in its spiritual home in Hualien. A total of 350 people from 13 countries, including Australia, the United States and South Africa, took part in a spiritual training event at the Jing Si Hall, Hualien. They included Tzu Chings, their team leaders and Tzu Cheng fathers and mothers.

Because this was the 20th anniversary, the event had a special meaning. Everyone hoped that the Tzu Chings from overseas could come together at their spiritual home and gain a deeper understanding of the religious and spiritual meaning of Tzu Chi.

On the first day, Dharma Master De Rang chose as her theme: “If there were no doctrine, it would just be another group of people. Everyone wants to be the first generation of disciples of the Master Cheng Yen. That means to endure difficulties with patience. When the road is hard, we still take that road and walk with endurance. We strive and go forward with the Master and the four missions as our shield.”

The best example of this spirit were two team leaders from South Africa, Zhu Heng-min and his wife Yuan Ya-qi, who took part in the event. Zhu is a Tzu Ching who returned from South Africa to Taiwan to do his military service; his intention was to go back to South Africa and work. During his military service, he met Miss Yuan who became his wife. He explained to the group that, before his return to South Africa, he and Miss Yuan came



to the Jing Si Abode to join a volunteer team. When they presented their report to Master Cheng Yen, she said to them quietly: “when you return to South Africa, you can walk the path of Tzu Chi with the older disciples and accompany the Tzu Chings!” This put the heart of Zhu at ease.

On their return, the couple divided their time between their work and Tzu Chi volunteer work. They often neglected to set aside time for their three-year-old daughter. “Auntie is always asking us why we do not take our daughter out with this. I want to tell my daughter: ‘sometimes take her with you when you are doing volunteer work. It would be a form of play for her.’” This caused Zhu to change his thinking when he was doing Tzu Chi work.

He was especially busy on the eve of the foundation’s 41st anniversary. During the day, he had to go to work and in the evening had to prepare anniversary; Yuan had other responsibilities in organization and planning. So their daughter was left on the side, playing on her own. Exhausted, she fell asleep. The event of the anniversary passed off successfully, with great solemnity; it made all their hard work worthwhile. “I must more faithfully do the work of Tzu Chi,” was the pledge made by people at the event with tears in their eyes and the promise to help the Master Cheng Yen make the world a better place; for the couple, it was their sweetest moment.

The participants at the Hualien event heard from two other members in a class on

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'Responsibility and Mission' before dinner. They invited Su Qi-ming, the and Lu Wei-cheng to share



their experiences. When Su moved to Brisbane, he did not speak a word of English; but he thought of the mission given to him by the Master to have the strong heart of a lion and the patience of a camel. "If you grow up together with the Tzu Chings of Australia, this is something that will make you very proud," he said.

One special feature of the event this year was the participation of local Tzu Chings from Indonesia and South Africa. Chandra Ferdian was one from Indonesia; he stood out from the team because of his different colour; he does not speak Chinese but stood together with this fellow volunteers. Before they set out, he spent a month with the Tzu Chings in Indonesia, attending practice and study meetings. He took part in the 'Water Repentance' performance, taking the dharma into his heart and making himself a better person.

In addition, there were four local volunteers from South Africa – Kttumalo, Buhle, Nokuthula and Belinda Marie Van Der Berg. It was the first time that Belinda has attended a training session; she came early to Hualien, to attend classes for those at work. Yuan Ya-qi, who was traveling with her, told everyone that each year the volunteers in Durban hold a one-day humanities class in a nearby school. After attending for the first time, Melinda said that she would very much like to join the foundation. In 2006, the volunteers held a charity auction for orphans in Durban; for the auction, Melinda donated a backpack with a small bear, something her mother had given her 12 years before and which she dearly loved. The volunteers were very moved.

Melinda grew up in a single-parent family; she had a step father but he left the home after he lost his job. Her mother had no alternative but to take her to live on the streets. Later her school gave her to social workers, who forced her to go to Wylie House, a home for children. Belind



a's mother passed away last year, when she was 17. At the age of 18, she would have to leave Wylie House, according to its regulations; but the principal was compassionate and allowed her to continue living there. This year she passed an exam to enter a local university.

Yuan said that she was full of confidence for Belinda's future. "For a long time, we have brought Belinda to take part in many charitable activities in Durban and feel her heart is full of love. She is a fine girl. This year Tzu Chi in Durban started to provide scholarships to young students and she is one of them. We feel that she is a seed of a local Tzu Ching volunteer. So, through the scholarship, we can allow her to come to Taiwan and take part in this event and let this young seed grow strong and sturdy in Durban," she said.

Then the organizers arranged for Huang Cheng-hao and Lin Yi-fei, team leaders of the Tzu Chings at the Foundation, to describe the work of volunteers. They said that they take the will of

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the Master as their own and walk the path of difficulties. They hope that all the Tzu Chings can walk together forward with them.

(Article by Dai Jie-bi, Yang Guan-xiong, Gao ying-ying and Chen Zhi-shin in Hualien 23/12/2012)