

The World Prays For Japan

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Wednesday, 27 July 2011 14:59



From Zulus in South Africa to Bedouin nomads in Jordanian deserts to street peddlers in the Philippines, people around the world have chipped in to help victims of the massive earthquake and tsunami that hammered Japan on March 11. The desire to lend a hand transcends age, geography, color, or religion. Here is a sampling of what people have done to help.

SOUTH AFRICA

Cynthia Ntuli is a Zulu in Durban, South Africa. She and her five children live in a small house with a roof that leaks. After the death of her husband, she had to do whatever she could to provide for her family, be it cutting grass for others or even going through trash cans for food scraps. Soon after Tzu Chi volunteers first visited the family, they took daily necessities and blankets to the house.

The help from this group of strangers deeply touched her. With their encouragement, she has taken charge of a soup kitchen that is based in her own small kitchen. Three days a week, the kitchen feeds 350 AIDS orphans in the community.

Cynthia is now a Tzu Chi volunteer herself, and she has recruited six others to join her in volunteering for Tzu Chi. Twelve needy families receive regular help from them. Cynthia has transformed herself from an aid recipient to one who helps others. Her transformation is all the more admirable because, of all the Zulu volunteers in Durban, she has probably the least at her disposal.

She was able to pull off such a transformation because of a change in her heart rather than an improved financial situation. As a matter of fact, she is as financially strapped as before, making just 60 rand (nine U.S. dollars) a week, but her goodwill initiative has gotten like-minded helpers to stand behind her, each chipping in what they can.

There is a plot of flat land in front of Cynthia's house. Tzu Chi volunteers taught Cynthia and her group to turn it into a vegetable garden, which now supplies the soup kitchen with such fresh picks as cabbages, carrots, taros, and onions. Cynthia also collects nearly-expired food from stores that are willing to donate it to the soup kitchen. Knowing that she is doing all this for AIDS orphans, her neighbors donate a rand here and a few cents there in support of her cause. Together they have been able to put food on the table for the orphans.



On this day, snap peas and cabbage were simmering on the stove in Cynthia's kitchen while outside under a large tree some Zulu volunteers were stoking up a fire with twigs to cook phutu, cornmeal porridge. While the food was being prepared, volunteers set up simple audio and

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video equipment and led a gathering of orphans and neighbors in a prayer for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that had hit Japan just two days before, on March 11.

“Let us pray sincerely and make donations to help,” a volunteer said. “Our love will reach the victims in the far-off land and give them strength as they rebuild their homes.” Orphans dropped the coins Tzu Chi volunteers had given them into donation boxes. Neighbors also emptied their pockets of change.

This is how, in a small corner of the world, a group of orphans and ordinary people like Cynthia did what they could to help care for the world.

JORDAN

Eight days after the disasters in eastern Japan and halfway around the world, a group of Bedouins in Muwaqqa, Jordan, sincerely chanted the Quran. They were praying for Japan even though many of them probably did not know where it was exactly. The occasion was a relief distribution event. More than 200 needy families had gathered to receive aid supplies from Tzu Chi.

The Jasmine Revolution that had started in Tunisia had rippled through the region, sparking demonstrations and unrest in Jordan. Even so, local Tzu Chi volunteers carried out aid distributions as usual, hoping to help bring peace and stability to society.

Collection boxes in hand, volunteers made a round of the distribution venue and encouraged the Bedouins to donate for the disaster victims in Japan. They responded enthusiastically, dropping their pocket change into the collection boxes. A boy carefully put one coin in and said, “This is mine.” Then he dropped another one in and added, “And this is my brother’s.”

THE PHILIPPINES

Every weekend, eight-year-old Julie Ann Moya sells plastic bags in shopping malls and markets in Manila to help with her family’s finances. When the kind, innocent young girl saw Tzu Chi volunteers soliciting donations on the streets for Japanese quake survivors, she immediately put the five pesos (12 U.S. cents) she had just earned into a donation box. Despite her poverty, she did not hesitate to give.

On March 14, in Marikina, Metro Manila, Mayor Del de Guzman led the weekly flag-raising ceremony at the city hall. Tzu Chi volunteers were also in attendance. The city had been flooded in the aftermath of Typhoon Ketsana one and a half years before, and Tzu Chi volunteers had helped the city in its efforts to recover (see the Winter 2009 and Winter 2010 issues of the Tzu Chi Quarterly).



After a prayer led by Tzu Chi volunteers, the mayor walked around with a collection box for the 700 city government employees there to donate. He said, “It’s a beautiful thing to see so many

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people give for a good cause.” Vice Mayor Jose Fabian I. Cadiz expressed his gratitude to Tzu Chi for giving Marikina a chance to be the first city in the Philippines to offer help to Japanese disaster victims.

Pacita dela Paz, 60, was one of the employees present. She donated 20 pesos (46 U.S. cents). “We Filipinos, especially here in Marikina, are always ready to help in times like these,” she said. “It broadens my heart to be able to extend aid even though my contributions are small. I hope that the prayer we offered for the disaster victims in Japan will help their recovery, and I hope that calamities will not strike any other countries anymore.” Her thoughts reflected the general sentiments at the ceremony. The donations they made might be small, but every penny contained unlimited sincerity and support.

TAIWAN

On March 17, a group of Tzu Chi volunteers visited Xiaowei Elementary School in Yilan, eastern Taiwan, and led the students, teachers, and staff in a prayer for the suffering in Japan.

A few days earlier, many of them had a real scare after the Japanese quake. A tsunami warning was issued for some coastal areas in Taiwan. Fifth grader Lin Jia-yi (林嘉宜) said, “My home is by the Pacific Ocean. I was really in a panic after the quake. Luckily, Taiwan was spared from the tsunamis.”

Yilan was severely ravaged by Typhoon Maggie in October 2010. Many in the school had personal experiences with the devastation. Principal Wu Zhi-kun (吳志坤) was stranded in the school the night the typhoon hit. The first hot meal he ate after the storm was delivered to him by Tzu Chi volunteers. His home was buried to the second floor by a mudslide; Tzu Chi volunteers and army soldiers helped clear out the debris. He, of all people, understood the horror of a disaster and the warmth from a helping hand.

Wu encouraged his students to give love, emphasizing that the more devastating a disaster is, the more love one should give. “We live in a global village in which everyone’s destiny is inextricably bound together. Let’s pray with the utmost piety that every [suffering] family will find relief,” he implored.

MALAYSIA

On March 16, the Melaka Tzu Chi branch held a prayer service for Japan at the local Jing Si Hall. Volunteer Hu Jia Jian (胡家健) told the 1,700 audience members about his own change: “I used to believe that disasters were things that happened far away from me. Although I knew every reason on the books why I should become a vegetarian, I always managed to find excuses for not doing so. One excuse was that I always believed that, as a machinery maintenance engineer, I needed a lot of stamina. But the great earthquake in Japan has really unleashed my compassion. I’ve decided to rein in my craving for meat.”

[Editor’s note: In Buddhism, eating vegetarian is a good way to cultivate compassion, accumulate merits, and create good karma. It is believed that when everyone’s compassion is aroused, positive energies will prevail in this world, and all kinds of disasters will be forestalled.]

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