

Vows and Commitments in South Africa

Written by Lin Sen-shou
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Since 1989, Tzu Chi has established offices in 47 countries. The majority of the volunteers in those countries are ethnically Chinese. They devote themselves to charity work and cultivate blessings for themselves through perseverance and hard work.



From November 20 to 24, 2008, over 800 volunteers from 24 countries returned to Taiwan to attend annual training camps. Master Cheng Yen certified 500 of them as Tzu Chi commissioners or members of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps. Among the group were two Zulu commissioners from South Africa.

In South Africa, with Great Love as their spiritual foundation, Taiwanese volunteers have motivated many local people to join their ranks. Despite differences in their skin color or religious faith, native volunteers in South Africa make the same commitment: to promote Tzu Chi and spread seeds of love and goodness around the world.

Sharing makes us rich

Tzu Chi started its charity work in South Africa in 1992. In 1995, volunteers established a training center in Durban to teach sewing. The city now boasts 524 such training centers. In 2004, the “Blue Bank Project” was launched near Ladysmith. Like the sewing training centers, the Blue Bank Project assists local residents to become self-sufficient by providing them with cloth, sewing machines and needles so that they can make clothing for sale.



Sheila-Gladys Ngema joined Tzu Chi in 1998 and became the first Zulu commissioner in 2006, blazing a trail for others to follow. There are now volunteers in Johannesburg, Ladysmith, Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and the neighboring country of Lesotho. Currently, over 3,000 native volunteers are spreading Great Love in Africa.

Most local Zulu communities are poor, and residents barely manage to get by. However, many have become richer through sharing and giving what little they have.

Doris Zwane, in her sixties, became a Tzu Chi commissioner in 2007. She said, “We have a mission that transcends national borders, and that is to spread Great Love and compassion. This doesn’t require a high level of education, nor does one need to have a lot of money—all one needs is love. As long as one has love, one can do a lot of things.”

Doris lost a leg in a car accident when she was 13, and she has to rely on an artificial limb and a crutch to walk. But this has not prevented her from doing good deeds. When she is helping

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other people, she forgets about her disability. She knows that there are many others in much worse situations than she, and she wastes no time and energy on complaining or feeling sorry for herself.

“Helping needy, sick people is our responsibility. I never feel tired when I cross mountains and rivers to care for people. Instead, such experiences have taught me to appreciate what I have even more. Being a Tzu Chi volunteer and being able to give makes me feel spiritually fulfilled. I always keep the Master’s wise teachings in my mind to keep me going.”

Shiny black pearls



Mini Ngcobo, a Tzu Chi commissioner in Umlazi T, a township near Durban, cooks a pot of food for 25 AIDS orphans. Nearby is a kitchen garden she cultivates with Tholokele Mkhize, also a Tzu Chi volunteer. This garden, the produce of which is cooked to feed AIDS orphans or distributed to help the needy, is a miracle of love created by Tzu Chi volunteers in South Africa.

Umlazi T is an area infamous for rampant violence, robbery, and burglary, yet the vegetable garden remains unvandalized. Tholokele explains how this is possible: “Everyone in the community is a Tzu Chi security guard! The good deeds done by Tzu Chi volunteers have won so much approval from the community that everyone works together to protect the vegetable garden.”

Most of the native volunteers that have joined Tzu Chi in the past decade have never been to its headquarters in Taiwan. Still, sustained by a strong sense of commitment, they staunchly march forward on the path of helping the needy. Despite being in difficult circumstances themselves, they radiate light and warmth through their benevolent and altruistic actions. Indeed they shine as brightly as black pearls.

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