

The Tzu Cheng Faith Corps

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How does one become a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member? The first step is apprenticeship. The second is training, which lays the foundation for the last step--certification as a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member, which is both a commitment and a duty.

If you ask members why they wanted to join the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps, many might say, "Out of curiosity." They first noticed how friends who joined the corps incredibly became so gentle and modest. Some were encouraged by their wives who were Tzu Chi commissioners, and some received a push from their Tzu Chi friends. They agreed, perhaps reluctantly, and waited to see what was going to happen. But once they joined in, they never regretted undergoing the apprenticeship, traineeship and certification as Tzu Cheng Faith Corps members.

Many join this unique, decent upright organization to get away from harmful friends and to get rid of their own bad habits. Others join because they are tired of the constant pursuit of power, wealth and prestige. They wish to seek the true meaning of life in a world of faith and charity.



Total devotion

The Tzu Cheng Faith Corps was formed at least twenty years after the establishment of the Tzu Chi Foundation. They have made rapid progress because they paid special attention to organizational structure and administrative efficiency. Such characteristics can be seen in the training of corps members.

Anyone who desires to join and has been nominated by a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member can begin with a series of courses, such as the Tzu Chi missions, spiritual seminars, Buddhist etiquette, the Ten Precepts of Tzu Chi, visiting the poor and fund-raising. In addition, trainees can also be assigned to such services as setting up meeting places, directing traffic, driving, standing night watch at the Taipei branch office, and so on.

How long does it take to become a certified member?

Well, it depends. Generally speaking, it is no less than two years. That period of time should be long enough for a candidate to see whether he is suited to the nature of the organization and vice versa.

"Devotion to Tzu Chi does not simply last for one or two days, or even one or two years," said Chang Shun-teh, deputy commander of the Northern Taiwan Division of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps. "No matter how early or how late you join in, your 'seniority' is a matter of how deeply committed you are. If the karma is right, you will vow to be a Tzu Chi member and walk on the

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Path of the Bodhisattvas through all your lives in the future." From a small interest in the beginning to an eternal great vow, the process is really worth pondering.

Good husbands and good fathers

From the moment they begin, the trainees dedicate themselves cheerfully to their training. After all, they themselves chose this way to be of service.

"The training is not easy," said Ni Shih-kai, a retired army colonel who was certified in 1996. One day at the beginning of his training, he had to run an errand in Nantou in southern Taiwan. In order to make the training class in Taipei, he started driving around four in the afternoon so that he could reach the Taipei branch office in time. Before the class was finished, he had to excuse himself so that he could get back before his dormitory closed at 11:30.



"One participant lived in a suburb of Taipei, and every day he had to spend three hours on the road," said Ni with admiration for that member's perseverance. "That was even more difficult."

Lin Ming-tzu, who was in charge of the training, observed that trainees are often very mindful. "One brother had an important appointment, but he still hurried back to the class even though there were only thirty minutes left. Another one came to the class using a crutch because he had just had an accident."

Most Tzu Cheng Faith Corps members are middle-aged men who have to be aggressive in their careers. There is definitely a conflict between their devotion to Tzu Chi and their need to manage their time for their business. "If they want to be idle or quit, they can always find a good excuse," said Chiu Yi-lien, another deputy commander of the Northern Taiwan Division.

Although one has to devote oneself to really understand Tzu Chi, Master Cheng Yen expects every member to be "a good husband and a good father." She keeps reminding them, "Don't forget to go home and have supper with your family." She also said, "To participate in the Tzu Chi missions, you have to take good care of your family."

The most important thing about serving the public is that it should be continuous. Thus, it helps if a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member can get the full support of his family in doing good deeds.

The beginning of commitment

"I felt as if I had found a home for my soul." Huang Chien-li can never forget how he felt the moment Master Cheng Yen granted him his certificate. He became so emotional that he couldn't help crying and he needed the help of two commissioners to leave the stage. When asked about his thoughts on his apprenticeship and certification, he said, "Tzu Chi is not only a charity organization, but also an organization for spiritual cultivation." When he was certified, he kept reminding himself, "Now I have committed myself to Buddhism and to all beings. I have to take the Buddha's compassion as my own and the Master's commitment as my own." Therefore, he stressed, "Once you take the first step, you just have to go on until you are

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certified."

"Certification is a kind of encouragement, but it is not like receiving a diploma," said Hung Wu-cheng, deputy commander of the Central Taiwan Division. He believes that it is an acknowledgement of achievement in studying Tzu Chi materials and also a continuation of the Tzu Chi spirit. It is a personal commitment to the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps as well.

"The certification itself was not much, but the moment the Master granted me that certificate gave me so much pleasure because I felt so close to the Master," Ni Shih-kai recalled. "I guess it was a feeling of passing the torch."

Some members might have gone astray for a while, but they feel their final certification is like returning to the bosom of a beloved mother. Some members might feel the joy of participating in the honor and sanctity of the organization. But whatever the feeling is, the end of the short ceremony is the beginning of a life-long commitment.



Bravely and cheerfully

Cultivating new Tzu Cheng Faith Corps members is a heavy responsibility. Facing new trainees who come from all walks of life and some of whom may have had high achievements in society, the leaders in charge of training sometimes worry about what they can give these newcomers. "Just tell them what you do every day and then do what you say." Master Cheng Yen's short explanation solves all the problems.

"Leading people is a kind of mission and also a kind of passing on the torch," said Chiu Cheng-wen. He treats trainees as his colleagues and cares about them as if they were his own brothers. The important thing is to keep their enthusiasm burning brightly.

Wang Ming-ho, another mindful cadre in the Eastern Taiwan Division, remarked, "The emphasis of training is to root the Tzu Chi concept in their minds and at the same time to be their companions. We hope to build a warm environment so that they can be comfortable here."

Wen Cheng-nan, who was certified in January this year, is seventy-eight years old. He said that it would not be easy to teach new members of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps. Since all the trainees come here voluntarily, the leaders cannot give them direct orders as if they were army conscripts, yet they must find ways to give their charges a feeling of group solidarity. Their spirit truly deserves a big thumbs-up.

"The title and position of a leader only show the weight of his responsibility," said Chiu Yi-lien. The most important thing in a volunteer organization is that everyone should share the same goals and principles. It is not a matter of who should obey whom. Only in this way can we keep the organization moving.

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Yang Kuan-hsin, a retired army major general, used to give orders to others, but he is now receiving guidance from a cadre. He said, "Giving orders to soldiers is nothing, but to lower oneself and be guided by others is really something!" That remark coincides exactly with Master Cheng Yen's admonition, "Take the responsibility bravely and cooperate with each other cheerfully." When leaders take their responsibility bravely and members cooperate cheerfully, the organization can run smoothly.

By Li Wei-huang
Translated by Norman Yuan