

The Buddhist Compassionate Salvation General Hospital

A Buddhist nun who started a tiny charity mission by selling home-made baby shoes for a dollar a pair has gradually created a charitable organization serving all of Taiwan. Joining with other Buddhists she has displayed great compassion and courage throughout the many painstaking struggles that have occurred during nearly twenty years.

At present, her ever-expanding Buddhist charity mission provides many kinds of charitable services: soup kitchens, food banks, child-care centers, free medical clinics, and home-services for hundreds of needy and helpless people, primarily those in the mountainous eastern coast region of Taiwan.

It was a miracle by the greatly compassionate Gwan Yin Bodhisattva (Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva) that occurred more than thirty years ago that first inspired a young Buddhist novice to found this impressive charity organization.

Miss Wang Chin-yun, daughter of a theater proprietor in central Taiwan, was only fifteen years old when her mother suffered from serious gastric ulcers. A surgical operation was deemed necessary but quite risky. When Chin-yun, who was a very filial young girl, learned that Gwan Yin Bodhisattva would save those who suffer upon hearing their prayers, she prayed day and night to Gwan Yin Bodhisattva to save her mother's life. Gradually, her mother was healed without having to undergo surgery. With deep heart-felt appreciation for the great compassion of Gwan Yin Bodhisattva, the young girl vowed that she would provide help for the needy and spread the kindness of the Bodhisattva. She decided the first step was to leave home and become a Buddhist nun and cultivate herself. It was not until 1960 that she had an opportunity to fulfill her goal to leave the home-life. She stayed in seclusion for two years in South Taiwan practicing self-cultivation. Later, she moved East and continued her cultivation at Pu Ming Temple.

In February, 1963, she went to Taipei City, Capitol of Taiwan, to be enrolled in a 32-day Course for novices to study and take vows of basic precepts at Lin Chi Temple. She qualified herself at this pre-ordination course and was ordained by Venerable Master Yin Hsun, a respected contemporary Buddhist monk. She was given the Dharma-name "Cheng Yen" which may be translated in one way as "To be Solemn."

Bhikshuni Cheng Yen, returned to the humble cottage she built behind the Pu Ming Temple at countryside of Hwa Lyan to study *The Flower Adornment Sutra*, and other holy sutras of great wisdom. She and her followers supported themselves. They did not ask for alms, and they did not perform Buddhist ceremonies in order to make money.

In 1966 during a brief visit to a follower who was in a private hospital in Feng Lin, Bhikshuni Cheng Yen encountered an impoverished aboriginal woman who was suffering from a miscarriage. She was refused medical care because she was unable to pay admission fees; the woman was left to die. The nun felt so sorry for this unfortunate woman and for many other people in similar situations that she felt that she must not delay any longer in founding a Buddhist charity organization.

She vowed that she must do something at once, even if in a very humble way.

Returning to her hut at Hwa Lyan, she and her followers, six girls in all, immediately began to increase their daily production of baby shoes to make money in order to support the charity project. They also campaigned in the city of Hwa Lyan from door to door asking every housewife to donate fifty cents of her food budget each morning in order to join them in helping needy patients. They managed to set up a humble free clinic for the poor, which began to flourish in time. More and more donations of medicine flowed in from the public to support the distribution of free medicine and free medical care for people in need.

On June the 24th, 1966, Bhikshuni Cheng Yen officially registered her Buddhist Compassionate Salvation Mission as a non-profit legal body under the Non-profit Society Act of the Laws of the Republic of China, in order to expand the scope of its charity activities. More and more people volunteered to help the nun's charity works. In response to their calls, public donations of money and materials flooded into the small headquarters of the Mission in the humble cottage. Bhikshuni Cheng Yen and her followers old and new took initiative to search for those in need of relief.

The motto of the Mission proclaims: "We are following the Buddha's compassionate way of saving those who are experiencing misfortune and who are in need. We shall give all we can to assist the homeless, the orphaned, the starving, the ailing, the handicapped, and the aged who need our help."

For those who want to come to take shelter in her, Bhikshuni Cheng Yen sets a basic requirement that they must devote themselves to the actual works of the Mission without any vague promises.

The number of volunteers that have joined the Mission grows. Some come with money donations, others offer labor and time. In 1983, the number of membership of the Mission reached a new height: 56,000 members in Taiwan, 360 in North America, 280 in North Eastern Asia, 470 in South Eastern Asia. And membership is still increasing. Every member works hard on a volunteer basis providing their own travel expenses. Some campaign for funds for the Mission goods. They do not want any compensation for their services. The members are primarily Buddhist. All the world's major religions are represented and people who join come from all walks of life: housewives, students, public servants, youths, senior citizens, soldiers, labourers, affluent business-men, school teachers, university professors, dentists, doctors, and nurses and so forth All members work hard toward the common good of helping those in need.

In grand total of 17 years of operation, from 1966 to year end of 1983, the campaigners of the Mission have raised NT\$ 11,567,070,000 (US\$ 4,000,000) of which every penny has been effectively used to aid the needy in various conditions. The Mission's newest project is to build a large charity hospital which will provide complete medical care for needy patients. The plans for this unprecedented Buddhist charity hospital compound have been designed by a competent architect. The medical building will have eight floors with wards to provide 600 beds for in-patients, and a complete system of modern medical departments including X-Ray Department, Kidney Machine Department, Heart Surgery Department, Pediatrics Department, Burns Treatment Centre, Surgical Operation Rooms, and many more facilities to take care of in-patients and 1,500 out-patients per day. Another building will be devoted to convalescence and rehabilitation for the elderly and

chronically ill patients. There will also be a separate medical laboratory, a nursing school a dormitory for nurses, a group of living quarters for resident physicians and their families, a Memorial Hall, and so forth--all to be constructed on a hillside on ten square acres of land near the railway station of Hwa Lyan for the convenience of the needy patients. The construction of this complex is estimated at NT\$ 1,192,000,000 (approx. US\$ 30,000,000). It is projected to be completed in three phases over a period of three years. The first phase needs NT\$ 50,000,000 (approx. US\$ 2,500,000).

Recently an impressive ground breaking ceremony officiated by twelve Buddhist monks leaders headed by the Venerable Master Yin Syun, with Governor Lin of Taiwan, marked the beginning of the first phase of construction. The sewage system and foundation are now being built. When completed the Buddhist Compassionate Salvation General Hospital will probably be the largest of its kind in the world. However, funds for the hospital's construction are far from what is needed. Without your help this compassionate humanitarian project cannot be completed. It is hoped people will resolve to support the construction of this hospital complex for the needy. Such good deeds plant blessings and are a source of developing merit and virtue.

All donations will be publically acknowledged. The names of generous donars will be commemorated on plaques in the hospital. Address donations to the Buddhist Compassionate Salvation Mission to:

No 21, Kang Loh Village,
Hsin Cheng Hsiang
Hua Lien County,
Taiwan

Please write or print your cheque payable to: (separately)

Buddhist Compassionate Salvation Mission (for your donation to support its charity courses)

Buddhist Compassionate Salvation General Hospital (for your donation to support its construction and operation).

by Peter Faun Canadian Author