History:

The Tzu-Chi Charity Foundation was established in 1966, in Taiwan, by the Dharma Master Cheng Yen, together with her five disciples and thirty followers. It was funded by the personal savings of thirty households. By the early 1990s, worldwide membership had grown to over 3 million, with over US $68 million channeled into relief projects, including long-term assistance to 12,000 families receiving monthly support. In Taiwan, Tzu-Chi provided cash and food assistance to the neediest families, free clinics and subsidies for medicines and medical services, disaster and emergency relief, and funeral support services. It also opened the Tzu-Chi hospital, with 100 beds and a research center, in 1986. The Ta-lin Branch Hospital, constructed in 1993, offers 1,000 beds. On the educational front, Tzu-Chi manages the Tzu-Chi Junior College of Nursing as well as the Tzu-Chi College of Medicine. Scholarships are provided for students in these institutions.

Beginning in 1991, Tzu-Chi began international relief efforts by extending aid to victims of the devastating tornadoes in Bangladesh. Thereafter, the organization provided 20,000 people affected by the great flood in Eastern China with cash, clothes, food, seeds, and fertilizer. It also built 3,107 homes, 12 schools, and 15 nursing homes in those communities. And beginning in 1993, Tzu-Chi provided $770,000 over three years to Médecins du Monde to assist the famished in Ethiopia. Worldwide, Tzu-Chi now has branches in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and Africa.

Tzu-Chi Hawai‘i was founded in 1996, when its parent organization in Taiwan was celebrating its 30th anniversary.

Mission: The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation is a worldwide Buddhist charity organization whose local offices serve their communities in the areas of community service, health care, education, and culture. Tzu-Chi volunteers appreciate the opportunity to give and help, and do so regardless of race, nationality, or religion, without asking for anything in return. The human touch, expressed through a spirit of love, joy, and compassion, is a core value, so all relief items are presented personally to people in need.

Tzu-Chi Foundation, Hawai‘i Office
慈濟基金會夏威夷分會
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Activities  Tzu-Chi Hawai’i concentrates its efforts in the following three areas:

Community Service  Volunteers visit the sick, dying, and aged at Kaiser Permanente and St. Francis Hospital. They provide companionship to the residents of the Palolo Chinese Home and the children at the Shriner’s Hospital for Crippled Children. Tzu-Chi Hawai’i has been designated to work in partnership with the American Red Cross to operate an emergency shelter at the Honolulu Convention Center in case of need, which could accommodate 15,000 to 20,000 people. To date, about 60 members have been trained in disaster relief by the Red Cross. And for the environment, volunteers organize regular beach cleanups and take care of the Chinatown Sun Yatsen Park under Honolulu’s Adopt-A-Park program.

Health Care  Through the Tzu-Chi Free Clinic at 333 N. King Street Room 101A, the organization provides free services to between fifty and sixty patients each month, who are otherwise left out of Hawai’i’s healthcare program. Thirteen doctors, seven nurses, and ten non-medical personnel volunteer their services, and provide consultation, laboratory examinations, medication, and specialty referrals. Sponsorship by the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center allows access to lab and diagnostic services. Since the Tzu-Chi Bone Marrow Registry in Taiwan is the largest such databank in Asia, the Hawai’i volunteers were able to find a donor for baby Alana Dung of Honolulu, in 1996.

Education  The Tzu-Chi Academy has nine teachers and about 130 students, ages 4–18, grouped into four levels, utilizing a curriculum that focuses on moral values. Classes are held Saturday, 1:30–4:30 pm, and Sunday, 8:30 am–noon, at 1238 Wilhelmina Rise. Tuition is $200 per semester.

Membership: Since its inauguration at the East-West Center on the campus of the University of Hawai’i, Tzu-Chi Hawai’i has grown from 200 to 900 members. All local activities are covered by local sponsorship, and through private donations.

Association President: 1996–pres. Dr. Jerome Fong-Liang Fan

Sources: UCS publications; website; correspondence with Jerome Fan