

Opening of Three Schools in Haiti - a Landmark

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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May 17, 2013, was a landmark day -- a historic moment for the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne, education in Haiti and the country's post-quake reconstruction. At 10 a.m, 500 guests filled the front atrium of Collège Marie-Anne secondary school, while more than 100 students watched from the second and third floor balconies. There were many dignitaries in attendance -- including Bishop Quesnel Alphonse, nuns from several orders, Jordanian peacekeepers, Senate President Simon Desras, Canadian Ambassador Henri-Paul Normandin and Port-au-Prince Mayor Dr. Marie René.

They were attending the opening of three schools the foundation has built -- the Christ the King Secretarial School and College Marie-Anne primary and secondary schools -- for the Montreal-based Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne. The schools will serve several hundred of Haiti's best and brightest students. They are the most visible examples of the foundation's help to the country devastated by a catastrophic earthquake on January 12, 2010 that killed up to 300,000 people in and around the capital, Port-au-Prince. Since then, the volunteers have never left the side of the Haitian people, through immediate, mid-term and long-term projects.

First to speak was Senate President Desras: he asked for the blessing of God and of the Buddha. He expressed the hope that Tzu Chi will remain in Haiti, for the country still has a long journey ahead.

Next was Ambassador Normandin of Canada, who delivered his speech in French. After having lived eight years in China, he added words of gratitude in Chinese: "Tzu Chi came to Haiti after the earthquake to help and has now built such a wonderful school, allowing the children to receive a quality education and helping Haiti to develop."

Port-au-Prince Mayor René said that, where the earthquake had left ruins, there now stood lofty buildings. She expressed the hope that the students will study hard and prosper in order to do justice to these buildings. She also called Tzu Chi a model for all non-governmental organizations that want to help Haiti.

The moderator of the event offered special thanks to David Chang and his team at the Overseas Engineering and Construction Corp. (OECC), as well as Tzu Chi volunteer James Chen, who made 35 trips to Port-au-Prince during the past three years to assist in planning the project. As these men stepped onto the stage, they were greeted with a standing ovation.



Stephen Huang, Tzu Chi's Executive Director of Global Volunteers, expressed gratitude on

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behalf of Dharma Master Cheng Yen and all Tzu Chi volunteers. He especially thanked the peace-keeping forces from Jordan, Brazil, United States, China, and elsewhere for all their assistance after the earthquake that made it possible for Tzu Chi to hold relief distributions. He also thanked Dharma Master Cheng Yen for leading worldwide fund-raising that bought millions of dollars to help Haiti and rebuild the schools.

Huang told the audience that, during this visit to Haiti, he had been given three tasks by Dharma Master Cheng Yen. First, he was asked to see if OECC had done a good job building the schools. He asked his listeners: "were the schools built well?" Everyone applauded as they shouted, "Yes!" Second, he was to ask Sister Rita Larivée, General Superior of the Sisters of St. Anne, whether she would accept the three schools. Sitting in the audience, Sister Rita raised both hands and answered: "Yes!" Third, he was to find out whether Haiti still needed Tzu Chi even after the schools were rebuilt. All those present shouted: "Yes!" When a student representative of Christ the King Secretarial School rose to speak, she thanked Dharma Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi for rebuilding her school and also thanked local entrepreneur Madame Roy for her donation of 60 computers. She said, "Words cannot express our gratitude, so we will dedicate a song 'Protector of My Soul' to Tzu Chi volunteers instead. Tzu Chi volunteers go all over the world to help others and are always full of joy. So, we hope that God will protect Tzu Chi volunteers and let them complete their mission."

One of the nuns responsible for establishing Collège Marie-Anne primary and secondary school said that the sisters pray for Dharma Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers each day during mass. She also asked everyone in attendance to stand and applaud to express their gratitude to Dharma Master Cheng Yen.

A student representatives of Collège Marie-Anne made a special presentation of a commemorative plaque to Tzu Chi. It was joyfully received by Stephen Huang, James Chen, Tzu Chi U.S. CEO Han Huang, former U.S. CEOs William Keh and Austin Tsao and Tzu Chi Education Foundation CEO Paulina Luan.

Sister Rita was the last to speak during the ceremony. On behalf of all the Sisters of St. Anne around the world, she thanked Tzu Chi for the wonderful gift. She said: "without you, the Tzu Chi Foundation, we would never have been able to rebuild what we lost during the earthquake of January 2010. Your commitment to those in need in the world will make a major difference in the lives of many Haitian children and young adults. Your gift, however, is much more than these buildings; it is a gift of hope in a country where hope was sometimes difficult to find following the earthquake...."

"We come from different religious traditions, this is true. We are Catholic and you are Buddhist. Yet we feel that we are among friends and family members when we are with you. Truly, our spirits are united as one as we respond to the suffering of others in the world...."

"Following the earthquake, many people came to Haiti to help. And many people made many promises and said they would come back. But as the months passed, many people did not return and many promises were broken. But you came back and you did what you said you would do. You kept your promise. This was worth more than the buildings. You gave hope. You

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gave commitment. You gave friendship. And you gave love.

“The project, under the guidance of Mr. Chen, was not easy. There were many challenges to solve. But you always found a way to solve the problem. And you did this with great kindness and great patience. This, too, was a wonderful gift. You taught us that hope and compassion can overcome many obstacles. You taught us that strong values and respect for the human person is the first priority, that this is the foundation for all projects.



“You cannot see the foundations of these new buildings, but they are not made of cement and steel. The real foundation is much deeper than the cement and steel. The real foundation is the courage you have given us that nothing is impossible. The real foundation is the strength you showed us that when people work together, dreams can come true. The real foundation for these schools is that compassion does work miracles.

“You have been our teachers and we are grateful. And these buildings will remind all the students, for many, many generations, that they, too, must do the same. They must show compassion and caring to the world. And they must believe that nothing is impossible and that they can create a better world.”

Many in the audience were visibly moved by Sister Rita’s speech, especially the words: “You gave hope. You gave commitment. You gave friendship. And you gave love.”

With her words, the ceremony was complete and all those present re-convened at the main gate for the ceremonial grand opening of the five-story school building whose wall plainly reads “Collège Marie-Anne—Donated by Tzu Chi Foundation.” For all the generations who will follow, these simple words and these buildings will bear witness to Great Love: the love that transcends religion, race and nationality.