

A Letter to Dharma Protectors and Friends in 2023

Dear Dharma protectors and friends,
Auspicious blessings!

“Bells of the old year and bursts of firecrackers bring us into the New Year.” Moving on to 2023, I hereby send forth the Chinese New Year greetings from Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Fo Guang Shan, to you all: “May Benevolence and Harmony Bring Peaceful Wellbeing, Let Abundance and Joy Yield Auspiciousness.” The Venerable Master compassionately explained that in the Year of the Rabbit, may kindness and compassion be the keys to wholesome outcomes.

This is the 57th year since the founding of Fo Guang Shan in 1967. We are grateful to the Venerable Master in leading both the monastic and lay assemblies to develop a new vision of Humanistic Buddhism despite all challenges and difficulties. As this beacon has now passed down to our generation, not only should we look at the past but also make prospects for the future.

Let us take a look back at 2022. In terms of FGS’s first objective: “to foster talents through education,” the Fo Guang Shan Light Transmission College, founded by the Venerable Master years ago, was reestablished in 2021. The goal is to enhance the Dharma propagation ability and Buddhist studies of Fo Guang Shan disciples, while the objective of the college is to “understand Fo Guang Shan’s principles and realize them in the world.” Last year, two courses were offered under the “Buddha’s Light Philosophy” theme, namely “Buddhist Youth” and “The Principles and System of Fo Guang Shan.” Furthermore, elective courses such as Dharma services, sutra studies, social education, reception service, digital Dharma propagation, monastery cooking, Dharma

lecture, communication and counseling, and English sutra studies were offered. Over 1,300 Fo Guang Shan disciples participated in the courses.

Significant achievements were also accomplished by the Fo Guang Shan University Consortium. In April, United Kingdom's Times Higher Education announced the 2022 Impact Rankings. 45 universities across Taiwan were ranked, and Nanhua University was tied in the 14th place and placed 5th among private institutions.

In July, University of the West in the United States was reaffirmed for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). Furthermore, the university degrees and academic qualifications issued by the University of the West are now officially recognized by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (Taiwan). In addition, construction of Guang Ming College's academic building and Three Acts of Goodness Arena were completed in August. On top of that, Nanhua University was ranked 8th globally and 1st domestically by Australia's UniRank 2022 World Buddhist University Rankings, while Fo Guang University placed 23rd globally and 3rd domestically.

For three consecutive years, Nanhua University has been awarded the "Annual Enterprises Protection Award (AEEPA)—Gold Level" for its continuous promotion of energy conservation and carbon reduction. In November, the university received the prestigious Titan Award. Moreover, Nan Tien Institute's "Communities of Practice," an online discussion platform for applied Buddhism, reached its 100th session in October. This is a milestone for a united effort in building a friendly and harmonious community.

Pu Men High School has always remained committed to providing excellent education and realizing the Venerable Master's "Seeds of Hope Project." Three students including Wang Yen-ming won first place in the high school category in the 2022 Taiwan Science Exploration Fair. In December, Pu Men High School's baseball team set the best record in the school's history by winning second place in the Black Panther Flag National High School Baseball Championship.

The propagation of Humanistic Buddhism has gained more opportunities in the current times. In September, Dajue Temple, the Ancestral Temple of Fo

Guang Shan in Yixing, cooperated with Shanghai University in establishing the Institute for Studies on the History of Buddhist Thoughts and Humanistic Buddhism. Moreover, Fo Guang Shan University Consortium held an MOU ceremony with University of Malaya, the oldest and most prestigious national university of Malaysia, to promote future teaching and research exchanges. In November, the Humanistic Buddhism Research Centre was established in the university.

In December, the FGS Institute of Humanistic Buddhism held the “*Researches and Studies on Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism* Book Launch and Symposium” at the Center for Chinese Studies in Taipei. Eleven scholars have systemized, professionalized, and academicized both theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism from various aspects including philosophy, literature, religion, and sociology. The era of Humanistic Buddhism will surely bring the light of hope towards the future development of Buddhism.

In terms of FGS’s second objective: “to propagate the Dharma through culture.” On top of the continuous efforts of the Fo Guang Buddhist Canon department in editing different Buddhist canons, various editions of significant Buddhist Canons as well as Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s works in both Chinese and the world’s main languages were added to the Sutra Repository of Dajue Temple, Ancestral Temple of Fo Guang Shan in Yixing, Mainland China.

In August, *Buddhist Legends of Adventure & Courage—Master Xuanzang* was published by Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise. The comic was awarded the 44th Recommended Reading By Elementary and Middle School Students by the Ministry of Culture. In November, both Chinese and translated publications of Venerable Master Hsing Yun were showcased in Australia’s book fair for the first time. Furthermore, the PDF front page of the *Merit Times* is archived by the American website Freedom Forum. The *Merit Times* is also available in 17 countries and regions across four continents.

In Melbourne, Australia, the “Wisdom & Light Immersive Experience—The Journey of Venerable Master Hsing Yun and His One-Stroke Calligraphy” was organized by Fo Guang Shan and co-organized by the David Yu Family Foundation. This first immersive digital light art exhibition was also a

transboundary collaboration with Artists in Motion, attracting over ten thousand local visitors.

In September, the “Framework Agreement for Cultural Artifacts Exchange Collaboration between the Association of Chinese Artifacts Exchange and FGS Foundation for Buddhist Culture and Education” was held in the Buddha Museum. Mr. Li Qun, President of the Association of Chinese Artifacts Exchange, and I signed the third five-year collaboration via video conference, adding a new page to cross-strait Buddhist cultural artifacts exchange.

It is impossible to recount all of the Dharma propagation activities held by all Buddha’s Light members around the globe, but your efforts in Dharma propagation do not go in vain.

In the past three years, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, Buddha’s Light members from all over the world have come together to show their love and support by continuously donating supplies and aids. The city governments of Taipei, New Taipei, and Taichung as well as Nantou county government have recognized the efforts of various organizations and institutions, including Fo Guang Shan Monastery, Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) Chunghwa, Taipei Vihara, Jin Guang Ming Temple, Da Ci Temple, and Qing De Temple.

On behalf of Fo Guang Shan and BLIA Chunghwa, I received both the “Individual Award” and “Group Award” of the Social Education Contribution Award given by the Ministry of Education respectively. This is a shared honor for all Buddha’s Light members.

Last year, many countries and regions around the world also faced chaos and instability. The Russo-Ukrainian War, political conflict in Afghanistan, and the economic collapse of the Sri Lankan government led to shortages of energy,



Fo Guang Shan Melbourne celebrated the Buddha’s Day _ Multicultural Festival by collaborating with Artists in Motion in creating an immersive digital light art exhibition. (Photo by Luis Chiang)

food, and medical supplies. In response, Buddha's Light members provided immediate humanitarian care and assistance to these places, including Malaysia, India, and the Philippines.

In February, Venerable Jue Cheng, Deputy Secretary-General of BLIA, Southeast Asia Region, successfully coordinated with the Global Peace Mission (GPM), Golden Horse Investment Bank, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia in delivering donations of goods weighing 4715kg to Kabul International Airport in Afghanistan. In March, Venerable Jue Cheng led a delegation to Islamabad, Pakistan, to attend the first International Buddhist Conference. She interacted with Dr. Arif Alvi, president of Pakistan, during the opening ceremony of the conference, as well as presented the English version of the Venerable Master's publication, *I Am Not a Monk 'Sponging Off' Buddhism*.

As for religious exchange, the third presidential committee of the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua, was sworn in February under the witness of Hsu Kuo-yung, Minister of the Interior of the Republic of China. The presidents include: Venerable Hsin Tao, founder of the Ling Jiou Mountain Buddhist Society; Venerable Shou Yu, abbot of the Ten Directions Buddhist Community; Venerable Wu Yin, abbess of the Luminary International Buddhist Society; Venerable Ru Jing, abbot of the Bliss and Wisdom Sangha; Wu Chih-yang, Legal Affairs Officer of BLIA World Headquarter; and myself.

As the pandemic subsided, the Fo Guang Shan International Ten-thousand Buddha Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony was held from October 15th to November 1st. Venerable Master Hsing Yun was honored as the Sila Upadhyaya and 208 preceptors from New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia, Canada, India, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan participated in the ordination ceremony. The percentage of preceptees from different Buddhist temples was highest compared to previous ordination ceremonies. Not only was this a recognition of the rigor of Fo Guang Shan's preceptorship, but also a result of a harmonious Buddhist community in establishing the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua by the Venerable Master. Before the completion of the ordination ceremony, the preceptors went on alms procession at Chiayi and Taichung. The spirit of the devotees in supporting the event despite the rain and wind was extremely touching.

The effort of all Buddha's Light members in propagating the Dharma globally with the spirit of Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings received widespread recognition. For example, Most Venerable Hsin Ting established the Tai Chi Language School and Thai-Chinese Buddhist Texts Translation Center at Thai Hua Temple. The translated Mahayana texts published by the center were presented to over 300 universities in Thailand, promoting Buddhist exchanges between the Northern and Southern traditions.

In September, Venerable Hui Chuan, Executive Deputy Abbot of Fo Guang Shan, went to the Mazu Cultural Park in Penghu and presided over the Purification and Blessing Ceremony. A 48-meter bronze Mazu statue, the tallest in the world, was built in the park. The entire coastline of Penghu can be viewed from the park, spurring the development of local tourism.

In August, Venerable Miao You, abbess of Zu Lai Temple, Brazil, was appointed as the only religious committee of the Brazil's Council of Women. In October, the Brazilian Association of Ambassadors of Peace presented the Peace Achievement Award to Venerable Master Hsing Yun in recognizing his contributions to world peace, as well as Fo Guang Shan's effort in promoting virtue and beauty in the world. In November, the Fo Guang Shan Compassion Foundation, which is dedicated to social welfare and charitable endeavors, received an award from the Charity Festival of Chinese.

In the same month, the New Zealander of the Year Awards Office presented the 100 Kiwibank Local Hero Medallists for the 2023 Kiwibank New Zealand Local Hero of the Year Award Te Pou Toko o te Tau: a group of exceptional and diverse Kiwi, each taking extraordinary action to better the communities, and the nation. Venerable Man Shin, abbess of Fo Guang Shan New Zealand, was the only Asian and religious recipient, creating a new record on the history of Buddhism in New Zealand.

In December, the Cardinal Shan Foundation, Fo Guang Shan, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kaohsiung co-organized "The Way of Liv'in Love" event. With the spirit of compassion and love, the participants prayed for Taiwan, working together for world peace and a brighter future.

Despite the crisis faced in 2022, Buddha's Light members have transformed them into opportunities for future developments. The 30th

anniversary of BLIA was celebrated in October, and the “2022 BLIA Fourth Meeting of the Seventh Board of Directors” was held for eight days in FGS Hsi Lai Temple, the founding place of BLIA. Over 10,000 BLIA members from all corners of the world participated in this first metaverse meeting, and held discussions on topics such as culture, education, charity, and preservation.

During the meeting, Fo Guang Shan and NetDragon Websoft Inc. launched the Dharma-verse together, becoming the first Buddhist group to combine virtual Dharma propagation with metaverse. The smartphone version will be released in the future with additional new functions such as morning and evening chantings and virtual personal shrines.

In May, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Taiwan, the *Merit Times* overcame numerous challenges to hold the “Vegetarian Culture Festival—Joyous Vegetarian Life” at Hall 1 of the Taipei World Trade Center. 600 vegetarian vendors participated in the event, and a Buddha’s Birthday Blessing Ceremony was held in praying that the pandemic will soon come to an end. Furthermore, after two years of development, the “Joyous Vege Lifestyle” app, which includes more than 5000 vegetarian restaurants, was released on World Vegan Day (November 1st). The app has received widespread recognition.

In response to the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in combating climate change, five departments including BLIA and *Merit Times* participated in the 2022 Asia-Pacific Sustainability Action Expo

and Summit. During the summit, BLIA Chunghwa announced the effort of carbon sequestration through the T-Earth Forest Restoration Project, hence reaching the goal of net zero carbon emission by 2023 and becoming the first net zero religious group. Fo Guang Shan also provided 100 hectares of forest area as a response to the project in hope that more effort in forest restoration will follow.



The T-Earth Forest Restoration Project organized by BLIA aims to plant one billion trees by 2050. (Photo by Chang Ying-jung)

A Letter to Dharma Protectors and Friends in 2023

FGS Buddha Museum and the Dr. Cecilia Koo Botanic Conservation Center established the “Buddhist Botanical Gardens” in the Buddha Museum. The gardens were planned based on classics such as Master Faxian’s *Record of the Buddha’s Kingdom*, Master Xuanzang’s *Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty*, and the *Pronunciation and Meaning in the Complete Buddhist Canon*. With 56 species and 230 trees, the Buddhist Botanical Garden has the largest number of Buddhist plants in Taiwan.

In addition, the World Climate Foundation (WCF) has recognized the T-Earth Forest Restoration Project, and a framework partnership agreement was signed in New York by representatives of BLIA in September. Moreover, BLIA also attended the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt, realizing “Environmental and Spiritual Preservation” as advocated by Venerable Master.

As the Venerable Master has said, in the future, Fo Guang Shan shall focus on the development of education, culture, art, sports, music, academic, and technology, as well as to expand Buddhist involvement in global issues, so that we can achieve:

Harmony between tradition and modernism,
Co-ownership by monastic and lay disciples,
Equal emphasis on practice and understanding,
Integration of Buddhism, literature, and arts.

May you and your family enjoy peace and safety during the Spring Festivals.

Hsin Bau
Head Abbot
Chairperson, Fo Guang Board of Directors
New Year’s Day, 2023

(Translated by the FGS Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Center of
International Affairs)