



GENERAL SECRETARY'S SPEECH

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Rotary International Convention
Sydney, Australia
4 June 2014

Good morning, everyone!

This is the fourth convention I've attended as your general secretary, and I know that many of you here have been to many more than that. But I think I speak for all of us when I say that this has been one of the best Rotary Conventions yet. Don't you agree?

Part of the beauty of Rotary service is that every club and every Rotarian can choose where and how they wish to serve. And I think all of us here have had the experience of feeling a project resonate especially deeply — of standing for a moment in the shoes of the people that Rotary has helped, and knowing just how much their lives have been changed.

For me, that project was one I heard about soon after I took on the role of general secretary — one that was in so many ways typical of Rotary. A team of optometrists, opticians, and Rotarians, supported by two Rotary districts and a Rotary Foundation grant, had gone to the Philippines with crates full of donated children's glasses. They tested the vision of thousands of low-income kids, most of whom had never had their eyes checked before. When a child needed glasses, they got a pair on the spot, to put on and take home.

That project was just one project of hundreds I heard about in my first year as general secretary. But it hit home in a very personal way, because right up until a year before I began work at the Rotary Secretariat, I had been living with low vision. I could see pretty well with my glasses on, but without them I couldn't see anything but shapes and shadows. And when I heard about that project in the Philippines, I wondered how many of those kids had never seen the leaves on trees, the hands on a clock, or a face from across a room. I wondered how many of them, like me, would never have been able to read, or cross a street, or even share a smile, without that pair of glasses — that pair of glasses that now, thanks to Rotary, they had.

As I thought about those kids, seeing the world more clearly for the first time, I also saw Rotary more clearly: not only what we were doing, but what we could be doing. Bringing in those glasses was amazing and changed lives. But how many more lives could we have changed if we'd thought bigger: for example, finding a way to bring sustainable and comprehensive eye care to the region for the long term? How many

more lives could we change in the future, with more Rotarians, serving more effectively, in stronger clubs and districts?

Rotary is doing so much — but it could be doing so much more. We have so many successes to celebrate, and we also face significant challenges, which we need to address head on. The greatest challenges facing Rotary today are not new; perhaps it's time for us to think seriously about addressing them in new ways. Perhaps it's time for us to open ourselves to change, even radical change — because that is the only way to bring Rotary forward.

From the beginning, Rotary was designed to reflect the needs of its members and its communities. As Paul Harris wrote, almost 80 years ago: “This is a changing world; we must be prepared to change with it. The story of Rotary will have to be written again and again.”

And I want to urge all of you today to follow his advice. The traditional way of doing things may very well result in a strong and dynamic Rotary and may work in your club or district. But if it doesn't, then perhaps it's time to be doing things differently. Talk openly and honestly about what could be better in your club, about what's keeping you from reaching your potential. If club traditions, or club rules, are holding you back, change them and move forward. That's not walking away from tradition: that's doing things exactly the way Paul Harris intended.

Because Rotary's strength is in its members. When our membership is growing — both in size and strength — our clubs are more vibrant, we have more to show the world, and we have more resources with which to help Rotary flourish. All of Rotary spirals in a positive direction. Look at what we have achieved over the past decade with 1.2 million members in 34,000 clubs. Now think what we could do with 40, 50, 60 thousand clubs — with 2 or 3 million top-quality members. We'd be able to attract more partners, take on even more ambitious projects, leverage our abilities and our resources to have an even greater impact in our communities and in the world.

But the truth is that we aren't growing in many parts of the world, and our global membership number has been flat for the last dozen years. And our average member is older than ever before.

We've tried so many times over the years to get our membership numbers up by encouraging Rotarians to invite their friends, colleagues, and clients. Sometimes our numbers do go up a little, but so often they fall again. And yet, we keep trying in the same ways to increase our membership — even though at this point it's more than obvious that in many parts of the world those methods aren't working.

It's time to try something different. Because, to put it bluntly, Rotary's long-term survival depends on our willingness to let in some fresh air.

Of course we have to ask people to join Rotary, but just asking is not enough. To bring in new members, we have to show the world a Rotary that is powerful, relevant, rewarding, and diverse. To keep our

members, we need to offer an experience that lives up to what we promise and what they want. These twin challenges are what often stand between the Rotary we are and the Rotary we perhaps could be.

What is the Secretariat doing to help Rotarians address these challenges? Well, I'm glad to tell you that we're doing quite a bit.

First of all, we're working hard to raise Rotary's public image and strengthen its identity. We engaged a leading firm in the management of global brands to help us with the process of clarifying Rotary's image, and have created a host of new materials for clubs and districts to use to communicate the Rotary brand.

Thanks to the Internet, it's now easier than ever for people to find the information they're looking for — and we want to make it easier than ever for current and prospective Rotarians to find information about Rotary. So last August, we launched a completely redesigned Rotary.org website, with a refreshed look and feel that reflects our identity and communicates more clearly what Rotary is and what we do. The new website is also a fantastic resource for Rotarians, with tools such as Rotary Showcase, which lets Rotarians browse club and district projects, and share their own; Rotary Club Central, which is a fantastic tool for tracking your district's Rotary service and Foundation giving, and the Rotary Brand Center, which helps Rotarians tell the Rotary story better. If you haven't spent much time with the website, I would really encourage you to take a look at what's there, and see what might be useful to you as your club moves forward.

And speaking of moving forward, Rotarians everywhere continue the march forward in the drive to eradicate polio once and for all.

As you heard earlier this week, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has budgeted \$5.5 billion to get us to full eradication by 2018. Of this, almost \$5 billion has been either received or pledged. But we still need approximately \$563 million to get the job done.

And that's why we're asking Rotarians to End Polio Now — Make History Today.

We've entered into a very exciting new agreement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which will provide a \$2 match for each \$1 we spend on polio, up to \$35 million per calendar year, for the next five years. So if we spend \$35 million in a given year, we will get an additional \$70 million from the Gates Foundation.

If we raise and spend \$35 million per year over the next five years, for a total of \$175 million, we would get a maximum Gates Foundation match of \$350 million, bringing the total value of our giving to \$525 million — and the world even closer to being polio free.

We stand at a moment of historic opportunity: to end polio forever. This is the gift that we have committed to giving to the children of the world. And we all understand that it is also the best gift we can possibly give to the future of our organization. When we succeed in eradicating polio — and we will — we

will have established Rotary as a major global player in humanitarian service. We'll be able to attract more partners, more outside funding, and more members — so that we'll be able to serve even more effectively in the years ahead.

All of us working across the Secretariat, whether in Evanston or in our seven international offices, are here to help you. We're working to make sure your work is noticed, and talked about, and given the attention it deserves. We at the Secretariat are proud to support your service, as together we Engage Rotary and Change Lives so that Rotary's light continues to shine ever brighter — throughout this Rotary century, and in all of those to come!

Thank you.