



RI PRESIDENT-ELECT'S THEME ADDRESS TO THE 2019 INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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Good morning, everyone! Welcome to San Diego and to this 2019 Rotary International Assembly.

Did you all have a good trip to San Diego?

I know many people complain about traveling, and especially about air travel, but I have always loved to travel. Whether it is a train, a plane, a car, or a boat, I love going places. I love the sense of excitement and new possibilities, the chance to see things I have not seen and to meet people I have not met.

You never know what is going to happen, once you pack your suitcase and walk out your front door.

Which can be a good thing — or not.

A couple of months ago, my wife, Gay, and I had one of those travel experiences that would strain the optimism of even the most cheerful traveler. (That would be me.) We found ourselves at an airport where we were not scheduled to be, on a day we had not planned still to be traveling, having woken up that morning at a hotel we had never heard of the night before. It was one of those days.

But every journey is what you make of it. And there we were, with about six hours to wait, at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City. It is a busy airport with about 60 million passengers every year. Passengers fly in and out on more than ninety airlines, to most of the world's countries. For many, it is the gateway to the United States. So you see all types of people there. As we waited, I said to Gay, why don't we take a walk and people-watch. And we did. We went all the way from one end of the terminal to the other and back again, looking at every gate, every destination, every group of people waiting for their flight.

Sometimes you did not even need to look at the departure board to know where the flight was going. Those people were clearly heading to Taipei, or to Moscow, Cape Town, or Istanbul. Each gate was its own island of humanity. When we walked down the center of the concourse, we were in New York, moving along with everyone in one river. But

when you veered off into those seats, you left that current, and landed on an island. You were already in Buenos Aires, or Paris, or Tel Aviv.

As we started our walk, the thought had come to me: “All of these different people, all of these different countries, all in one place. This is like Rotary!” But as we walked past gate after gate, I realized something.

It was not like Rotary at all. Because everyone in that river was heading for an island. And every island stayed an island. The people all heading to Taipei might be talking to each other, but they were not talking to the people heading to Cairo or the people heading to Lima. The people heading to Amsterdam had nothing to do with the people heading to Lagos.

Contrast that to Rotary.

In the days ahead, you will not only meet and talk with people from all over the world — but also you will work with them, you will share with them, you will become colleagues and friends as you prepare together for one of the greatest adventures in your lives.

None of you knew, when you packed your suitcases and stepped out your front door, what lay ahead on this journey.

None of us knows now.

But I can tell you one thing. Every journey is what you make of it.

And the journey that each of us begins this week — the journey that we will continue together, into, through, and beyond the 2019-2020 Rotary year — will be what we make of it, together. Wherever we are from, whatever language we speak, whatever our culture or tradition, we are here together for one purpose.

To build a stronger Rotary so that more Rotarians and Rotaractors and all in our family of Rotary can serve our world better than ever before.

And looking forward toward the 2019-2020 Rotary year, I would like to talk to you this morning about our role in doing just that.

The goal of a leader in Rotary, or anywhere else, should never be achieving the most that you can possibly achieve. The goal of a true leader should always be getting everyone around you to achieve the most that they can possibly achieve. While I am confident that you will do your job well, I want all of you to be focusing, this week and beyond, on what you need to do to get your district and your clubs to a place where they are doing their best work. Your role is supporting Rotary’s members, in their clubs, and building a stronger organization. It is your role, it is my role, it is our shared role in the year ahead. Guided by our new strategic plan, we will work together to do just that: to increase Rotary’s impact, expand its reach, enhance participant engagement, and increase our ability to adapt.

And we will have four emphases that will guide us in our work.

The first emphasis is to grow Rotary — to grow our service, to grow the impact of our projects, but most importantly to grow our membership so that we can achieve more.

We talk so much about membership in Rotary. Every year, we talk about the same issues, perhaps in slightly different ways. In certain parts of the world, Rotary is growing rapidly. But in many regions we have not seen the kind of change we have hoped to accomplish. Last year, we set a Rotary record nobody wanted to set — we set a record in the number of people who left our organization. Some of them left because Rotary was not the experience they had hoped it would be. Some loved Rotary until the end of their lives. But they left, taking their ability, their experience, and their leadership with them.

Bringing in more members to replace the ones we lose is not the answer. It is like pouring more water into a bucket full of holes. We need to address the root causes of that member loss: member engagement that is not what it should be, and a member demographic that skews steadily older.

It is clear that it is time to make some fundamental changes. We already know what the barriers are to an engaged and diverse membership. It is time to act on what we know: creating new membership models, opening new paths to Rotary membership, and building new Rotary and Rotaract clubs where the existing clubs do not meet an existing need. That means not only making sure club presidents understand why it is so important to grow their own clubs, and membership overall, but ensuring that they have an effective structure for doing it.

Considering that membership is all that stands between a Rotary that serves and a Rotary that disappears, it is surprising how many clubs have no membership committee and whose entire approach to membership consists of exhorting existing members to invite their friends. Not only is that a sure path to clubs that all look the same, but it has also given us two decades without growth. What we need is an organized approach: a district membership chair in every district and a formalized membership committee in every club — consisting of multiple people of different backgrounds who are methodically looking not at individuals but at the community. What segments of the community, what positions, what professions are not represented in the club? Those are the people we need to find.

There is nothing revolutionary about that approach. It is one of the oldest ideas in Rotary. It is called the classification system. It has worked for 113 years, and we need to rediscover it and use it.

In addition, we must grow Rotary by forming new clubs. We need to form new clubs not just where Rotary does not already exist but in communities where Rotary is thriving. We need to start new model clubs offering alternative meeting experiences and service opportunities. And, remember, forming new Rotary clubs is the distinct responsibility of the district governor and the district.

The second emphasis for next year is even closer to home than our clubs. It is our families.

When I was a district governor, people sometimes asked me how I managed to balance my professional and Rotary responsibilities with two young girls at home. The answer was simple. Gay and I brought them along. As much as they grew up in the Maloney family, they also grew up in the family of Rotary. It was great for them. It was great for all of us. And it was also great for Rotary, because it meant that we did not have to choose between my club and our children.

We should never, ever expect our members to make that choice. We need to foster a culture where Rotary does not compete with the family but rather complements it. That means taking real, practical steps to change the existing culture: being realistic in our expectations, considerate in our scheduling, and welcoming of children at Rotary events on every level (right up to this International Assembly!).

We cannot change our demographic in Rotary if we ignore the daily realities of the very demographic we most need to attract: community-minded younger professionals. We need to meet them right where they are, at their stage of life — and welcome them.

And that brings me to our third emphasis: building a viable path to Rotary leadership for Rotarians who are actively involved in their professions.

The job of club president should never be seen as a time commitment too great for a busy professional to consider. The job of district governor should not come with the expectation that you must retire from your paying job first. By making volunteer positions into full-time responsibilities, we are closing the door to the contributions of the people we need most in Rotary — the ones with the potential for decades of Rotary service and Rotary leadership.

The Rotary ladder should not be so hard to climb — and it does not have to be.

We can make it easier. So many of the barriers to Rotary leadership are barriers we ourselves built, with expectations tailored to a different time and a different generation. It is time to adapt, to change our culture, and to convey the message that you can be a great district governor without visiting every club individually, and a great club president without doing everything yourself. You can take the lead in the year ahead — whatever stage of life you yourselves are in. Begin to change the culture of leadership in your own districts.

The three emphases I have just presented all focus on the internal health of our organization: the structure and functions that will allow us to grow Rotary. But Rotary does not exist in isolation from its communities. Rotary lives in the world it serves — and it serves to unite that world.

That is why our fourth emphasis will be a focus on Rotary's historic and enduring relationship with the United Nations.

In 2020, as Rotary marks its 115th year, the United Nations will be celebrating the 75th anniversary of its historic charter. It will be a time for us to celebrate our partnership as well, with a series of planned presidential conferences around the world and a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals that Rotary does so much to support. Whether we are working toward clean water, better health, improved education, or economic stability for the world's least privileged people, Rotary shares the United Nations' enduring commitment to a healthier, more peaceful, and more sustainable world. And Rotary offers something no other organization can match: an existing infrastructure that allows people from all over the world to connect in a spirit of service and peace and take meaningful action toward that goal.

In the words of our vision statement: Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

We are people of action — people who not only want to change the world but also have the ability to turn inspiration into real and lasting change.

We have that ability because of who we are and because of what Rotary allows us to do.

Rotary allows us to connect.

It allows us to connect with each other, in deep and meaningful ways, across our differences. It connects us to people we would never otherwise have met, who are more like us than we ever could have known. It connects us to our communities, to professional opportunities, and to the people who need our help.

Connection is what makes the experience of Rotary so very different from the experience of walking along the concourse at JFK airport. In Rotary, none of us is an island. All of us are here together — whoever we are, wherever we are from, whatever language we speak or traditions we follow. We are all connected to each other, part of our communities, and members not only of our clubs but of the global community to which we all belong.

That connection is what lies at the heart of the Rotary experience. It is what brings us to Rotary. It is why we stay. It is how we will grow Rotary. And it will be our theme in the 2019-2020 Rotary year: *Rotary Connects the World*.

In this ever more divided world, Rotary connects us all. This device in my hand allows us to connect with the world. As all of you have your phones out to capture the theme for the 2019-2020 year, I ask that you share the theme on social media. Take a photo, post it on social media, and share how Rotary allows you to connect with the world.

Through Rotary, we connect to the incredible diversity of humanity on a truly unique footing, forging deep and lasting ties in pursuit of a common goal.

As we begin our journey together, with optimism, courage, and joy, we know that this

journey, like every other, will be what we make of it. Let us approach the week before us, and the year that lies ahead, with the spirit of service and friendship that has inspired generations of Rotarians before us — knowing that through service, and friendship, and commitment, *Rotary Connects the World*.