



2024-25 THEME ADDRESS

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Hello, family of Rotary! I am honored to address the 24-25 class of district governors, the Irresistibles! And when I call you “my family,” I’m not just being kind. I really think of Rotary as my family.

I want to start today by putting a special focus on some very important members of our family of Rotary. In a couple of weeks, I’m traveling to Pakistan to meet with some amazing people: female health workers.

Ending polio everywhere means taking on this hard task, block by block, across Pakistan. It’s a difficult and, at times, dangerous mission. These women literally climb mountains to vaccinate children in remote locations. But that’s not even half of it. They fight misinformation and prejudice every step of the way.

When we finally eradicate polio in Pakistan — and everywhere — it will be due in large part to these women.

So when I arrive in Pakistan to meet with these workers, I want them to know that even though they will never meet most of you, they have your support, and you treasure their contributions. So I want you to give them a standing ovation that I can share with them on my visit ... hold on ... as soon as I get my camera ready.

In addition to your generous applause, the best way for you to support these health workers and the fight against polio is by raising awareness and raising money. It’s not too late to join or initiate a PolioPlus Society in your club or district. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is still matching our donations 2-to-1, but only if we meet our annual fundraising goal of US\$50 million.

To help raise awareness, I need you to contact elected officials and other government leaders. Remind them that polio is still a threat. Push them to support polio eradication. Polio remains our top priority and requires our fullest commitment. But there is so much important work to do.

Thankfully, we have Rotary’s Action Plan to make our work easier and to make the club experience simply irresistible. That’s where the magic of Rotary starts. We’ll need that magic if we’re going to bring healing in a divided world. The numbers of armed conflicts and displaced people around the world are rising at an alarming rate. We need to be at our best if we want to have a positive impact.

That means we might have to change a few things about ourselves as an organization. Change can be scary, but it's easier when we change together.

With that in mind, I invite all of you to become Action Plan champions so you can change your clubs for the better and keep Rotary strong. And there's plenty of room for continuity in the Action Plan, too. It's all about building on our best ideas, not abandoning them.

Think of the Action Plan as a tool to help you improve the club experience in your district. Remember, you have influence. District governors charter clubs. You can help club leaders think creatively and produce irresistible experiences, both for existing and future members. That could mean changing how things are done in your district. If your district has been doing things one way for 50 years, it's probably time to reassess. The Action Plan helps identify a club's strengths and weaknesses and what that club can do to improve.

If a club in your district isn't active or is losing members, maybe it's time to start a new club that fits better with the community. Ask club members what they want, and bridge that with the community's needs. Just because a club or district hasn't changed in a while doesn't mean no one is hungry for change. You have an incredible opportunity as district governors to empower club members to make improvements.

Check in with club members in your district. Ask them about their club experience and what can be done to make it better. And consider talking to leaders in your communities who are not Rotary members yet but should be. Maybe they don't know about Rotary. Or perhaps the current club structure in their community is not the right fit.

You might find that some members don't feel like they truly belong in their club. That's why expanding our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is so important.

Anyone who has the heart and hands for service belongs in Rotary, and I hope you'll join me in opening your arms to future people of action, even if — and in some cases, especially if — they don't look or act like the typical member of your local club. With DEI, it is easier to be united in a common purpose. It's in those moments when we are committed and focused that we are the most effective and relevant.

But the work can't stop there. No one will know our clubs are irresistible if we don't tell people about them! The fact is, we need storytellers to spread our positive image and to spread Positive Peace in these troubled times.

Peacebuilding is one of my top priorities, and this IA is more than your introduction to the role of district governor. It's a call to action to support Rotary's peacebuilding programs and initiatives.

One of those programs is the Rotary Peace Fellowship — a product of The Rotary Foundation that began more than 20 years ago to help peace and development professionals end and prevent conflict.

We offer the fellowships through our Rotary Peace Centers located at leading universities around the globe. More than 1,800 peace fellows have graduated from Rotary Peace Centers and are working in more than 140 countries toward a better world.

And thanks to a US\$15.5 million gift from the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation, we can continue supporting peacebuilders in more regions with the next peace center in Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul, Turkey.

The first class of fellows will arrive in Istanbul in early 2025. To mark this occasion, Rotary members, Rotary Peace Fellows, Positive Peace Activators, and others will be invited to attend a Rotary presidential peace conference planned for February 2025.

The theme of the conference (not our annual theme ... that's coming soon) will be Healing in a Divided World. This conference will focus on Rotary's peace efforts and provide opportunities to learn together.

You'll hear more about the peace conference at our convention in Singapore. I can't wait to see all of you there!

But there's so much more you and members in your districts can do to promote peace in the meantime. Members who want to spread hope for peace in their community can plant a Peace Pole in the local park, playground, or any community space. And one of my favorite tools for peacebuilding is The Four-Way Test. We would live in a better world if every Rotary member truly lived The Four-Way Test instead of simply reciting it.

Rotary members have plenty of ways to support peacebuilding efforts, but today, I want you to remember this: To spread peace around the world, we must first find peace within ourselves.

Performing acts of kindness can ease symptoms of anxiety or depression and promote social connection more effectively than any other known approach. We find joy in helping others, but we also face a tough balancing act. We must change ourselves *and* stay true to who we are.

That's why I have adopted the colors orange and sky blue as my theme colors. As a dominant color of autumn, orange represents the shifting of seasons — the end of one phase and the beginning of another. In fact, orange is the primary color of change.

Blue, on the other hand, is associated with knowledge and intelligence — trust, loyalty, and dependability. Blue inspires open communication. Combined, these colors represent our burning need to move forward together as we change ourselves and change the world.

With that, I've teased you long enough. Who's ready to hear the 24-25 annual theme?

All right, I'll tell you our theme. After one quick story!

Years ago, I was in the Dominican Republic helping install water filters. Two young boys watched as dirty water entered a filter in one end and emerged clean out the other end. I'll never forget the first time we stopped the water flow. One of the boys grabbed my sleeve and said, "Show me the magic again."

Obviously, the water filter wasn't magic. We worked hard to transport those filters, install them, and work with recipients in the area to maintain them. But those boys knew that easy access to clean water would change their lives. Knowing that I played a small part in that certainly changed *my* life.

And that is why our annual theme is *The Magic of Rotary*.

Now, don't misunderstand me: We are not going to grow membership, end polio, or bring peace to the world by waving a wand and saying some funny words.

It's up to you. You create the magic with every project completed, every dollar donated, and every new member inducted.

The Magic of Rotary can encourage whatever drives your local clubs. You can "grow *The Magic of Rotary*," if you're adding new members to our family. You can "unlock *The Magic of Rotary*" if you're unlocking the power of women and girls. You can "advance *The Magic of Rotary*" if you're fundraising to help change the world.

And when our year as Rotary president and district governors has come to an end, it's up to us to make sure there's a whole line of people behind us, ready to keep the magic going.

I love my Rotary family, and I can feel that love in this room. That's why I know you are capable of making every club in your district simply irresistible.

This International Assembly won't last forever. Make the most of even the smallest moments. The briefest connection could result in a lifelong friendship. The simplest lesson could change your entire Rotary career. Don't let these opportunities pass you by.

And when we return home, let's change the world by embracing *The Magic of Rotary*.