



2025-26 PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE ADDRESS

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Rotary International President-elect
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Good morning, bom dia, buenos días, bonjour, buongiorno, Guten Morgen, o-HAI-yo go-zai-mas, JO-un ah-CHIM im-ni-da, esteemed governors and leaders of Rotary.

Last year, we gathered here to address the governors-elect of 2024-25. At that time, I spoke as the president-nominee of Rotary International, highlighting membership growth as our organization's top priority, most valuable asset, and greatest challenge.

Today, as I stand before you as president-elect, I am more convinced than ever that our collective focus on membership is essential to securing Rotary's future.

Rotary's greatest asset is not our history, our projects, or even our unmatched global reach. It is our members — the best-qualified team of volunteers on the planet. I learned this lesson early on, during the Atlanta convention, when a representative from one of our polio partners praised the extraordinary dedication of our members. That recognition from an outsider deepened my understanding: Rotary's greatest gift to the world is its people.

Today, I want to share our road map to membership growth and revitalization, guided by three essential pillars: innovation, continuity, and partnership. These principles are not just strategies. They are a call to action to rejuvenate Rotary, to attract new voices and perspectives, and to strengthen our service to communities worldwide.

The world is changing, often at a dramatic pace. Technology, social expectations, and economic conditions evolve constantly, and Rotary must evolve with them. As Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote in "Il gattopardo" ["The Leopard"], "For everything to stay the same, everything must change."

Innovation is how we adapt to this changing world. It's not just about welcoming younger members but also engaging senior individuals seeking purpose and connection.

At 68 years old, I know firsthand how fulfilling it is to find a community of peers.

Consider the example of my home club, Santo André, a thriving legacy club with 150 members. My wife, Denise, helped charter a satellite club, creating a space for almost 50 remarkable women to lead in their own way.

Satellite clubs, cause-based clubs, enterprise clubs, and passport clubs are examples of the flexibility we need to attract a diverse audience. While these models may not work everywhere, they offer us the opportunity to reach future Rotarians outside our

traditional frameworks. Future Rotary members are out there. We must meet them where they are.

During my travels — more than six laps around the globe in the past 18 months — I've observed that the healthiest districts share one critical feature: consistent, united leadership. Districts thrive when governors build on their predecessors' efforts, ensuring programs and strategies continue seamlessly year after year. Conflict at the top, by contrast, is a time bomb that often results in declining membership.

Let me share some inspiring moments from this journey. In Nigeria's District 9141, I saw the incredible impact of building wells and commissioning school chairs in underserved areas. In Pakistan, I visited Smart Villages, where Rotary helped populations affected by the devastating 2022 floods move from survival to a better future.

In Mumbai, India, I met children receiving lifesaving care through a Rotary grant for congenital heart disease, and in another region, I witnessed ambulances lined up outside a palliative care hospital, each bearing The Rotary Foundation logo, supporting breast cancer detection, dental care, and eye exams.

In Lampung, Indonesia, Denise and I had the privilege to witness a microeconomic transformation for 700 families, to multiply farmers' family incomes on rice paddies.

Continuity is not about uniformity; it's about alignment. When district leaders work together, envisioning Rotary beyond their governor year, they set the stage for long-term success. Rotary already faces the unique challenge of annual leadership transitions. Let's not make it harder by fragmenting our efforts. Instead, let's build a legacy of collaboration that future leaders can build upon.

Rotary's history with polio eradication teaches us an invaluable lesson: Alone, we can achieve great things, but together, we can change the world. Partnerships with organizations like the Gates Foundation, WHO, and UNICEF have been instrumental in our US\$23 billion investment over 40 years to eliminate polio. We would never have made this much progress alone.

So why not apply this lesson to membership growth? Partnering with business associations, professional organizations, and academic institutions can help us attract quality members while embracing diversity in professions and perspectives. Such partnerships eliminate the false dilemma of quantity versus quality. By reaching out to professionals who share our values of service and engagement, we can expand Rotary's capacity to do good in the world.

Ultimately, all our achievements, projects, and partnerships depend on our members. Membership growth is not just about numbers. It's about renewing our collective strength and ensuring our mission endures.

First, we must acknowledge that no one lives forever. The only hedge against aging clubs is the constant admission of new members.

Second, our capacity for service grows with our membership. More members mean more hands to help and more resources to invest in our communities.

Third, succession planning is critical. Clubs either grow or dwindle. There is no such thing as stable membership.

We must make recruitment and retention a core value, passing it from one generation of Rotary members to the next. By doing so, we ensure that Rotary remains vibrant and impactful for decades to come.

Rotary members are people of action. We don't wait for change to happen; we make it happen.

And what do people of action do? We unite for good.

And that is our presidential message for 2025-26: *Unite for Good!*

In a world often divided, Rotary stands as a beacon of unity and hope. Our projects bring together people of all races, religions, genders, ideologies, and economic backgrounds, uniting us in a shared purpose: to do good in the world. Rotary inspires us to be better people, to serve others, and to create a lasting impact.

As you leave this room today, I urge you to focus on learning the best strategies for growing Rotary in your districts. Rotary has invested a great amount of time and money in this assembly, not for speeches and fanfare, but to equip you with the tools to lead effectively. Our return on this investment will be measured not in dollars but in the new members we welcome, the innovative clubs we create, and the lives we change through service.

And as you carry out this mission, don't forget one of Rotary's greatest joys: making friends around the world and having fun.

Together, let's embrace this journey of growth, service, and connection. Let's build a Rotary that unites for good and ensures a brighter future for all.

Thank you.