



RI PRESIDENT'S CONVENTION ADDRESS

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Hello, family of Rotary.

When I reflect on the past few months of our great organization, one word comes to mind: *resilience*.

Funding that we relied on to fight polio and pursue other projects was threatened or compromised. But we expanded our reach — and found ways to achieve our goals with the resources at hand.

In a time of global conflict and division, we have the courage to stand up for peace.

And I am deeply inspired by the resilience of President-nominee SangKoo Yun.

SangKoo reminds us that Rotary is greater than any one person. Even in the face of a serious disease, he chooses humility. That is a true tenet of leadership, and I look forward to SangKoo's presidential year in 2026-27.

But resilience comes in many forms.

After Mário de Camargo's sudden departure, Rotary filled the position of president-elect quickly, thoughtfully, and in accordance with our bylaws.

I want to thank Mário for his time as president-elect and for rallying the Rotary world behind our new message: *Unite for Good*.

And I am so grateful to Francesco for stepping up when we called on him to lead.

SangKoo and Francesco both understand that there is no room for ego in Rotary.

They understand that it takes all of us — together — to create lasting change.

Rotary's most powerful asset has always been *you*, our members. But we are only as strong as the people who stand beside us. So, let's take a moment to recognize each other. Turn to the person next to you, smile, and give them a high five or an elbow bump.

That, right there, is why we keep coming back to Rotary.

We talk a lot about goals and strategy. But without friendship, without encouragement,

none of it takes hold. Rotary works because we belong here. A high five, a smile, a laugh — these simple moments remind us: This is our community. And it matters.

At my club, we applaud every person who walks in. Even if they're late. It lifts the mood. It reminds everyone that they're part of something bigger. And you know what? Some of the best clubs I've seen are the noisiest. Not because they're disorganized, but because people are genuinely happy to see each other. That's the magic. That's the culture we want to create.

And let's be honest. Most of the time, Rotary doesn't look like this week in Calgary. It's not an international audience inside a stadium. Most of the time, Rotary looks like a Wednesday lunch. A coffee meetup. A service project on a Saturday morning. That's the club experience. And if the club experience isn't right, then we're simply not irresistible.

So what makes a great club experience?

It's the people, yes. But it's also the traditions. The tone. The culture. Some clubs ring a bell. Others sing songs. Some don't. There's no one right way to be a Rotary club.

But if your club is struggling, it's not enough to copy someone else's tradition. If you visit a thriving club that rings a bell, it's not the bell that brings them together. It's what's around the bell — the energy, the connection, the culture, the sense of purpose.

And as we think about what makes a club thrive, we cannot forget the importance of mental health.

President Gordon showed us the importance of mental health, not just with programs and partnerships, but with compassion. He reminded us that Rotary has an important role to play to ensure no one struggles alone.

That work continues with each of us. It means checking in. Making space for honesty. Being the kind of club where people feel supported and safe.

Because when we care for each other — in service and in spirit — we build a Rotary where everyone can thrive.

Beyond mental health, improving your club experience is impossible without awareness. That means asking hard questions: Are we inclusive? Are we joyful? Are we showing up for one another? Are we living the values we talk about?

And once we've asked the hard questions, we act. The Rotary Action Plan can help. It's a tool for reflection, for building alignment, for sparking meaningful conversations about where you want your club to go and how to get there.

And here's something else: To keep growing, to stay simply irresistible, we need to innovate.

Innovation is about reimagining how we connect. It's about making sure Rotary evolves

with the world around us. If we want to bring in new members, especially younger members, we can't expect them to adapt to us — we must be willing to adapt to them.

Our convention here in Calgary is a perfect example.

We have not followed the existing formula for a Rotary Convention. That's intentional. We've infused this week with the kind of energy and excitement you might find at a hockey game — music, lights, live entertainment. We've put more content into shorter time frames, with dynamic speakers and interactive formats.

We're rethinking how we deliver inspiration.

Why does that matter? Because attention is the new currency. If we want to engage people — really engage them — we need to meet them where they are. That means designing club meetings and events that are joyful, memorable, and fun.

Oh no! I said the word!

Oh, thank God.

I thought Johnny might pop up when I said “fun.”

Wait a minute.

John is right. That guy is a piece of work. I'm just glad he's not in *my* office.

Anyway, back to what I was saying.

We're not losing our roots — we're growing new ones. Tradition and innovation can go hand in hand. We can honor the past while creating space for the future.

Let's ask ourselves: What can we try that's new? What would make someone leave a club meeting and say, “I can't wait to come back”? Let's be bold enough to experiment, take risks, and lead with curiosity.

Because innovation isn't a departure from who we are. It's a deepening of our mission. It's how we make Rotary irresistible for generations to come.

Even strong clubs experience conflict. That's not failure — it's part of being a family. What matters is that we stick together. Whether we trust each other and enjoy each other's company enough to keep showing up.

You've heard me call Rotary my family. That's not a metaphor.

After a divorce, Rotary gave me the community I needed. I don't have children of my own, and my biological family is small. So when I call you my family of Rotary, I mean it.

And last year, Rotary grew my family in ways I never imagined.

In Slovakia, then-District Governor Katarina Cechova gave me the gift of a lifetime. She found a genealogist who traced my grandmother's roots to a small village, Jakubova Voľa. She organized a visit. And when I walked into the town community center, locals in traditional Slovak clothing welcomed me with song. I burst into tears — it felt like hearing my grandmother's voice again.

But that wasn't all. The genealogist worked with a videographer to make a short film about my grandmother. I watched it then and there in the community center.

I met František Rimský, a second cousin I had never known, and his family.

Meeting him felt like a lightning strike. He showed me his home, which happens to be the house where my grandmother was born. He showed me old photos of my father, my uncle — faces I hadn't seen in decades.

And that wasn't the only reunion Rotary gave me. Earlier this week, I told you about my trip to Manitoba, where I met more relatives, some for the first time. I visited the land my family once farmed and saw their resting places. My family tree grew because of my Rotary family and *The Magic of Rotary*.

The people who planned those visits gave me something truly special. No one *had* to organize these family reunions for me. But they did — because Rotary is friendship in action. It's connection that transcends national culture and distance. And that spirit belongs to every member in every club, not just the president.

Rotary showed up for me. And we show up for each other.

Like we did for Andrés Briceño of the Rotary Club of The Woodlands in Houston, Texas. If you read the April issue of *Rotary* magazine, you know his story. Andrés was in a terrible car accident, put into a coma just three days after founding the Rotaract Club of The Woodlands.

When he woke up, the nursing staff asked if he was famous. "So many visitors," they said. "That's not normal."

But it *is* normal — for us. His Rotary family visited him every day. They stood by his mother. They raised money for his physical therapy. They never let him feel alone.

That's Rotary at its best. That's the power of belonging.

Now imagine what the world could look like if *everyone* in Rotary felt that kind of belonging. Imagine what we could accomplish.

Because Rotary isn't just about service — it's about peace. And peace starts within.

I believe The Four-Way Test can be a guide to finding inner peace. The Four-Way Test isn't a tool to criticize others. Instead, it helps us treat each other with honesty, fairness, and kindness. If we apply it with compassion, we create spaces where peace can grow.

And our peace work is growing. Our work with the Institute for Economics and Peace has trained over 300 Positive Peace Activators in more than 60 countries. They've led over 900 educational initiatives and reached more than 12 million people.

Our Rotary Peace Fellows are driving change around the world. We've just opened a new peace center at Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul. And earlier, you heard about our plans to open yet another peace center at Symbiosis International University in Pune, India.

I have had the privilege of visiting all our peace centers around the world. They are all amazing. Every time I visit a peace center and meet the students there, I think to myself, "What did I know when I was 25?"

Programs like Rotary Youth Exchange and Friendship Exchange give us global perspective. Rotary Action Groups address the root causes of conflict, from disease to illiteracy. Our peace poles remind communities that a better world is possible.

So don't underestimate what you can do. You don't need a title. You just need the will.

And we must keep that will focused, because our greatest promise to the world is still unfulfilled: The end of polio.

We are closer than ever. I know you've heard it before. But the final stretch is always the hardest. We can't stop now. Not when children's lives hang in the balance.

Support the PolioPlus campaign. Join or start a PolioPlus community in your club.

Reach out to lawmakers. Advocate. Fundraise. Spread awareness.

And remember: The Gates Foundation will match your PolioPlus donations 2-to-1 if we reach our US\$50 million goal.

So, let's finish what we started.

Our belief that we can end polio once and for all matters. Our integrity matters. Our defense of public health, of service, of peace — all of it matters.

These are not political positions. These are Rotary values. And we're going to stick to them, no matter what.

And while we're at it, let's keep building a Rotary that's more vibrant, inclusive, and joyful. A Rotary that welcomes the next generation with open arms.

This isn't about changing who we are — it's about becoming more of who we're meant to be.

I've had such an incredible time this year learning and growing with my Rotary family. And now, it's time to pass the torch.

To Gordon — thank you for your guidance and your friendship.

To Francesco — thank you for stepping up and stepping in. I know Rotary is in good hands.

To the Rotary staff — you've supported me every step of the way. You've organized the past few years of my life and this convention, and I am endlessly grateful.

And to my aide, Tom Gump, and my executive assistant, Maria Lee — thank you for working together for two and a half years to make this journey so successful.

To the members who hosted me and organized my visits around the world — thank you. You welcomed me with open hearts and open homes. You found family that I had lost. You gave me so many gifts, and I treasure each one — including the gift of your time.

To the Host Organization Committee and volunteers — thank you for facilitating an unforgettable week. You made Calgary feel like home.

And to all of you — thank you for sharing *The Magic of Rotary* with me.

From health workers in Karachi to peace fellows in Tokyo, you are proof that Rotary's reach is truly global.

Even though I won't be president much longer, I will always be a proud member of this family. Titles come and go, but changing the world with Rotary is a lifelong pursuit.

This organization has made my life magical. *You* have made my life magical. But now it's time to take that magic further.

It's time to *Unite For Good*.

Let's finish the fight against polio. Let's keep building peace. Let's form new clubs and grow Rotary.

Let's make sure everyone who walks into a Rotary meeting gets a smile, a high five, and the message: YOU BELONG.

Thank you, family of Rotary. Let's keep making magic together.

Before I leave the stage, I want to take a moment not just to say thank you, but to show you what your kindness and friendship have meant to me throughout this unforgettable year.

So many of you have gifted me with your time, your stories, and your Rotary spirit.

You've truly lifted me up — and that brings me to our next performance.

This song is dedicated to all of you, my family of Rotary.