

John Kenny

Intercity meeting

It is a special pleasure for me to address so many of the most important people in Rotary in this year, and in every year. For you here today—you Rotarians, meeting in your home Rotary clubs—are the ones who will truly determine the success of this Rotary year, and the years that are to follow. It is to you that I say, *The Future of Rotary Is in Your Hands*.

The Rotary club, led every year by its own club president, is the building block and the foundation stone of all of Rotary. For the real work in Rotary is carried out by Rotarians working in their clubs for their own communities, and for communities in other lands which they may never see, but where they know there is a great need.

In this Rotary year, as in every Rotary year, there is much for us to do as Rotarians—in our clubs, in our communities, and internationally. We work through our service emphases of water, health and hunger, and literacy to meet needs and improve lives. These are of course very broad categories of service, and I wish to elaborate on some of the main issues which I would like you to address in your clubs in the months ahead.

Our first priority remains the eradication of the polio virus from the face of the earth. This has been our main priority as an organization since we first committed to PolioPlus, and it will remain our main priority until we have accomplished the task we set for ourselves more than two decades ago.

We in Rotary have a wonderful story to tell—cases of polio paralysis reduced by 99%, number of endemic countries reduced to only 4. We are nearing the end, and after many years of being the among a handful of organizations truly committed to ending polio, we have attracted a new partner: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has committed 355 million US dollars toward the work of eradicating this terrible disease. Rotary has agreed to match this with US 200 Million, of which 92 million has already been raised. And the governments of major nations have also joined the effort, making commitments totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.

This new funding is a vote of confidence not only in the feasibility of polio eradication—but in Rotary. Those who have entrusted these funds to us have done so because we have spent the last 104 years demonstrating that we are people to trust. That we are people of honor, of integrity, of sound ethics and good hearts.

This is why I ask you all to highlight, in this Rotary year, the importance of the second avenue of service, vocational service, which is sometimes the forgotten avenue of service. High ethical standards in business and personal life are still as important in 2009 as they were in 1905, the year Rotary was founded. Indeed, much of the problems our world is facing today have been caused by the failure to observe such standards in business affairs.

As Rotarians, it is incumbent upon each of us individually to maintain only the highest standards—the standards of the Four-Way Test, and those of our vocations and professions. For what each of us does, for good or for ill, reflects on all of us in Rotary. And it is true that a good reputation takes a lifetime to build, but only a moment to lose.

Our good reputation enables us to do so much—if we work constantly to deserve it, and if we are not shy about letting the world know of the good that we do. We in Rotary must be humble in our service, but at the same time we cannot allow ourselves to hide our light under a bushel. Public image is more important now than ever, and a broad and positive recognition of Rotary will only help us to better our service.

And when Rotary is seen and known to be an organization of men and women of character and action, it will attract people of a similar caliber. Membership continues as an ongoing problem in some parts of the Rotary world, but where Rotary clubs are seen to be active in the communities, membership is strong. I know that these are difficult financial times and the challenge is great, but I have faith in you to ensure that at the end this Rotary year, your clubs will have more Rotarians than they had at the start. It is a modest goal, and one that should be attainable for every club. By achieving it, you will strengthen your own clubs, and all of Rotary.

Rotary is about service; we should never forget that. Every club knows its own community best, and is primarily responsible to its own community. You know what your community needs, and you know how and where you can work to meet those needs.

And every club has a responsibility as well to serve internationally, for it is one of the strengths of Rotary that we come together to share our resources. Our service emphases of water, health and hunger, and literacy should guide us in our choices. For these are the areas where so much needs to be done, and where our expertise and our abilities can help a great deal.

Water is our first emphasis, and the first need of every human being. I believe that water is going to be the most important commodity in the 21st century. So we must work to ensure the future safety of supplies, but also ensure that safe clean water is provided to all who lack it, for it is a basic necessity of human life.

In this world of plenty, there are still too many who are existing in levels of poverty we can barely comprehend. As caring people, we have a duty to try to alleviate their plight. We can do this through work in health and hunger—helping children to grow up strong, and adults to live healthy and productive lives. And we can do this through our literacy programs, by encouraging and supporting projects to bring educational skills to all, and especially to girls. I believe that education is the key to banishing poverty in our world.

So I urge you to take up at least one project in our areas of focus – water, health and hunger, and literacy.

Every one of us today has made a promise. We made that promise the day we joined Rotary, and we renew that promise every time we put a Rotary pin into our jacket lapels.

Every one of us today has made a commitment. We made that commitment the day we joined Rotary, and we renew that commitment every time we put a Rotary pin into our jacket lapels.

We made a commitment to live honestly and well, to help where and how we can, and to put Service Above Self. And we joined Rotary because we knew that it would enrich our lives as well.

For each of us, our Rotary club meetings are the anchor of our week and one of the great constants of our lives. And our Rotary clubs are so much more than that. They ARE Rotary International—for there is no RI without its clubs. Our clubs are where and how we serve, where and how our friendship and fellowship thrive. If we look after our clubs—if we see to it that they are productive, inviting, and well run—then we look after all of Rotary. That is not something that anyone in Evanston can do. That is something that each Rotary club must do for itself.

And so I ask each of you, in this Rotary year, not only to serve—but to enjoy your service, to enjoy your clubs, and the fellowship and friendship within them. And I ask you to remember today the words of our founder, Paul Harris, who wrote, "Friendship is a living force, not a mere indulgence. Friendship is something more than conviviality... Friendship, like happiness, is frequently elusive when directly sought, while it as frequently comes to men unsought when they are working together in a worthwhile cause."

Through Rotary, we work together for the worthwhile causes of better communities, and a healthier world. I look forward to working together with all of you, and to the friendships I know that this year will bring.

*The Future of Rotary Is in Your Hands.* Thank you.