



Recently, I joined in a discussion about the importance of the dignity in the presentation of a Paul Harris Fellow.

That is why The Rotary Foundation has the beautiful medallion on a blue and gold ribbon, in order that it can actually be presented around the neck of the individual, along with the certificate and lapel pin to show that it is an event of special significance.

When someone commented that the presentation itself "gives a PHF its true value as a recognition of exceptional service," I felt that a little more explaining should be made. Certainly, to recognize a person as a Paul Harris Fellow should always be an honor to the individual, because it demonstrates significant support for the wonderful work of The Rotary Foundation.. But, just as a Paul Harris Fellow can be a "recognition of exceptional service," it can also be many other things, as well.

To describe a PHF only in terms of "exceptional service" is far too limiting for the entire Rotary world, and totally disregards the historical background of the expression of appreciation for a very generous contribution to The Rotary Foundation. If we did not think much broader in describing a Paul Harris Fellow, and realize it is primarily a magnificent way to raise money for The Foundation, I assure you that **The Rotary Foundation** would not be one of the great humanitarian and educational foundations of the world. What is the historical fact?

A few years ago, when I was a Trustee of The Rotary Foundation, I went back and read all of the minutes of the Trustees during the year 1956-57. In the year 1956, the total contributions to The Rotary Foundation were a little less than \$500,000 US dollars (\$493,722 to be exact). The Trustees began to think about how they could raise more money for the Foundation. What would be a good way to encourage Rotarians to give "big money"?

The Trustees finally came up with the idea of trying to get some Rotarians to give \$1000 in one major gift, by giving them a special form of public recognition. So, it was suggested that we call them "Paul Harris Fellows."

There were three conditions: the contribution must be at least \$1000; it must be from one individual; and it must be given within a single year. A very attractive pin and medallion were designed as a means to identify this type of generous donor. As you recognize, in 1957, a monetary gift of \$1000 was a very substantial amount of money. So, there weren't too many gifts, and thus, very few Paul Harris Fellows. As time went by, it was decided that The Foundation could collect more money if the gift could be collected and given over several years, and after there was a total accumulation of \$1000, the Trustees would designate the person as a Paul Harris Fellow.

Later, it was suggested, that if a club did not have just one person who could give a \$1000 in a personal contribution, maybe several persons could go together and make the \$1000 gift. Then the question was raised, "Who will be the person who is named the Paul Harris Fellow?" Gradually, the answer was for the donors or the Rotary club to pick one person who had long service, or some distinguishing characteristics, and name him or her as the PHF. Thus, in some clubs, the concept developed that a Paul Harris Fellow was just an award for exceptional service. The result was, that in those clubs a Paul Harris Fellow took on a totally different meaning (a reward for exceptional service) from its original purpose -- to encourage individual Rotarians to give larger contributions to The Rotary Foundation.



A Paul Harris Fellow

Ironically, in those clubs which chose to limit the Paul Harris Fellow recognition to a form of an "award for exceptional service," many Rotarians were discouraged from making large personal gifts to The Rotary Foundation since it might be interpreted as giving merely seeking or buying an "award." So, the per capita giving in those areas of the world is much lower than those areas where the concept of a Paul Harris Fellow is the original expression of appreciation by The Rotary Foundation Trustees for an individual, or in whose name, a gift of \$1000 is given to conduct the work of The Foundation. Has the Paul Harris Fellow recognition by the Trustees been successful as a fund raising scheme? Absolutely! As I mentioned above, in 1956, less than \$500,000 was raised annually by The Foundation.

Today, more than [\$100,000,000] is raised per year -- and about 80% of those funds come from individuals being named Paul Harris Fellows, or are naming other persons Paul Harris Fellows. The last time I checked, there were over [1,000,000] Paul Harris Fellows, and multi-Fellows in the world. They are the backbone of the annual support to The Rotary Foundation, and those donations are the only reason that enables Rotarians to carry on a world-wide program of educational and humanitarian programs.

So, what is a Paul Harris Fellow? Think for a moment of this statement: "A Paul Harris Fellow means whatever you want it to mean." Should The Rotary Foundation accept a \$1000 contribution as a way to honor a person for exceptional service? Certainly.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept a gift of \$1000 as an expression of happiness for 20 years of marriage, or a new grandchild, or success in one's vocation or family life? Of course.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept a \$1000 contribution in memory of a friend, relative or associate who has been an important asset to your life? Certainly.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept \$1000 if you really believe in the tremendous value of the humanitarian work of TRF in developing parts of the world and thereby express appreciation for your gift by naming you a Paul Harris Fellow or multi-PHF? Absolutely.

So, I suggest that a Paul Harris Fellow can mean whatever you wish it to mean. The Rotary Foundation benefits from your contribution and demonstrates this appreciation through the mechanism of a Paul Harris Fellow. That is the way I see it."

[Cliff Dochterman RI President, 1992-93](#)

