

Lend a Hand in your club

by helping to strengthen and diversify its membership. Focus on retention by making all members feel that they are an integral part of the group with an important contribution to make. Show concern for the well-being of members and provide help and support if they are troubled by illness or other problems. Keep in touch with the spouses of deceased members so that they remain part of the Rotary family.

Lend a Hand in your vocation

by upholding high ethical standards and encouraging others to do the same. Use your professional knowledge and skills to assist people in need. Mentor young workers and help them to progress in their careers. Develop programs for prisoners that teach vocational skills, preparing them to lead productive lives upon their release.

Lend a Hand in your community

by working to help those in dire need. Develop projects that provide food, clothing, and shelter and improve the quality of life for all impoverished community members, giving at-risk children a better start in life. Promote literacy efforts and vocational training to help jobless adults gain the necessary skills for gainful employment.

Lend a Hand in the world

by reaching out to people of all cultures, races, and religions. Through RI and Rotary Foundation programs, work to alleviate the abject poverty that afflicts so many people and obstructs the path to peace. Join with your twin club to develop projects that educate women, address population issues, establish microcredit programs, and help to meet the basic needs of the world's poorest people.

**Rotary International Theme
2003-04**



Lend a Hand



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Rotary International

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Dear Fellow Rotarians,

In our world today, millions of people subsist in abject poverty—their stomachs empty and their hearts filled with despair. In the world's poorest countries, men and women literally wear rags

because they own no clothes. Children run naked, their emaciated bodies a testament to malnutrition. Without access to health care or education, disease and ignorance fester and another generation grows up without hope for a better life.

This grim scenario is not uncommon throughout the developing world—a fact that many Rotarians know well. For years, Rotary clubs and districts have tackled the enormous problems found in places where people do not have enough food, clothing, or shelter—let alone clean water, schools, and clinics.

Poverty has many different faces. In my homeland of Africa, it wears a very visibly wretched face. In wealthier countries, poverty's face is frequently concealed, making its existence easier to ignore and even deny. Yet almost every community of the world is home to people in serious need. I ask Rotarians to open their eyes to those around them who cannot afford shelter, health care, food, and other essentials of a productive life and address these problems with compassion and pragmatism.

Most Rotarians have the good fortune to live in relative comfort, but in today's global village, the effects of wars, famines, and natural disasters can travel without restraint to all parts of the planet, blocking the path to a peaceful world. Because it is despair arising from poverty that ignites and fuels so much of the world's conflict, we Rotarians must first provide hope if we are ever to achieve our ultimate goal of peace. In 2003-04, I will be asking Rotarians to face these challenges and make the alleviation of poverty their number-one aim.

A key strategy in this campaign must be the education of women. Throughout most of the developing world, literacy rates are substantially lower for women than for men. This lopsided means of education ignores the fact that women are generally responsible for the education of children. Women who can read and write will pass on these skills to their children, guaranteeing that the next generation will achieve a higher level of literacy.

We can also fight poverty through microcredit projects, which provide small loans to establish modest business ventures—mainly to women, who frequently do not have access to conventional means of credit. As little as US\$100 can enable these fledgling entrepreneurs to break the cycle of poverty and provide for their families. Thanks to successful microcredit programs, entire communities have moved from a life of bare subsistence to one of hope for a bright future.

In 2003-04, RI will launch a Twin Clubs project as part of the Rotary Centennial celebration. This provides an ideal opportunity for clubs to join together to abate the misery that poverty produces in our world. Through World Community Service and Rotary Foundation Humanitarian Grants, we can work across oceans and borders to relieve suffering and bring hope, stability, and new opportunities for peace.

If Rotarians are to succeed in alleviating poverty and its many ill effects, our organization must be strong, our membership thriving. I believe our primary membership focus in 2003-04 must be on retention. It does little good to recruit new members if we do nothing to keep them active and involved in meaningful projects. We should also make them feel at home in the club, a part of a close, supportive Rotary family.

We must not, however, ignore our obligation to share Rotary with qualified men and women. In this regard, I will especially encourage clubs to bring in more women members. Although the number of female business and professional leaders continues to grow at a rapid pace, women remain woefully underrepresented in Rotary—forming less than 10 percent of our

overall membership. Clubs in more than 20 countries have not yet invited any women to join. The women who have joined Rotary since 1989 have kept our membership numbers from plummeting, greatly enhanced their club's service efforts, and made significant contributions to Rotary International as well. Recognizing the valuable role women Rotarians have played during the first decade of their membership, the 2001 Council on Legislation and the RI Board of Directors encouraged the promotion of dual-gender clubs. In fact, the RI Bylaws specifically state that no club may limit membership in the club on the basis of gender. It is now up to Rotarians at the club level to actively seek out and invite qualified women to become members.

To guide us on our path of service in 2003-04, I am asking all Rotarians to *Lend a Hand*. This is a simple theme, but one that I believe eloquently captures the essence of Rotary service. As Rotarians, we routinely *Lend a Hand* to our communities and to the world. We *Lend a Hand* to our fellow Rotarians, those who are members of our club and those abroad who need help in tackling problems in their community. Sometimes this simple gesture is all that is needed to transform a person's life. In other cases, one hand can become many, as Rotarians work together to eradicate polio, raise literacy levels, provide low-cost shelters, resolve conflicts, and alleviate suffering for thousands of people. It is in our Rotarian nature to offer help wherever it is needed, and in 2003-04, I will ask Rotarians to actively seek out even more opportunities to *Lend a Hand*.

Let us begin the 2003-04 Rotary year with our hands outstretched, ready to help our brothers and sisters in need. Working together, there is no limit to what the helping hands of Rotary can accomplish.

Jonathan B. Majiyagbe

President, Rotary International, 2003-04