

Good evening.

The playwright George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will.”

There is no shortage in this world of people able to imagine a better future. But in Rotary, we do not just imagine that future. We will it, and we work to create it. This we do through our two great strengths: our Rotary clubs, and our Rotary Foundation.

For our Foundation is the engine that drives the Rotary machine. Our Foundation gives us the chance to see and to fulfill the opportunities for service both within our communities and internationally. We can give those without hope, the chance to dream and to make their dreams come true.

Over the years I have been privileged to witness firsthand the fruits of the outstanding work carried out by Rotarians all over the world, supported by the programmes of the Rotary Foundation.

And one thing that impresses me, over and over, is how these programmes focus not on short-term satisfaction, or reward for the giver, or recognition. The best Rotary programmes and projects focus on helping build for the future—and making lives better for generations.

We all know the saying, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

I will never forget traveling through Tanzania and seeing a village water pump built through Rotary. Sitting next to the pump was a little girl with a coin box. And every time someone came to use the pump, they put their payment in that box. It was something very nominal, so that no one would be prevented by cost from using the pump. But it was enough that over time, a fund would be built up—and when a piece of the pump broke, or some need arose, the resources would be there to address it.

Having that fund meant something else as well. It meant that each user of the fund was not a recipient of charity, but a customer, paying for a service. It meant that they saw that pump as belonging to their community, and felt responsible for caring for it themselves. It meant that they did not feel shamed by using it, or beholden to others.

In Rotary, we do not serve for our own satisfaction or our own glory. We do not serve to feel the pleasure of munificence or superiority. We do not serve so that others may honor us.

We simply serve for the sake of helping others—to help others help themselves.

The Bible tells us that “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.” I do not believe that it is our responsibility to save the world. But as responsible people who have been privileged in so many ways, we’ve obligated ourselves to demonstrate our caring and deal with some of the most terrible problems of our day. And unfortunately, in this world of plenty, there are still too many places of great and terrible poverty, places where the most basic necessities of a dignified life—water, food, medical care—are in short supply, or lacking utterly.

But together we can help meet those needs, improve health, bring hope, and save lives. It is not pride or posturing to say this; it is merely the truth. We are in a position to effect changes of that kind, and the decisions we make in our service—whom to help, how, and when—are never to be taken lightly.

I was not in Tanzania seeing that water pump as a tourist. I was there to ensure that a project being supervised and funded by Rotarians was cost-effective.

I saw at first hand how the villagers broke stones by hand to make bottoming for the trenches they had dug to carry the water pipes. I spoke to village women who rose at sunrise to walk four miles across the bush to collect a bucket of water which they then carried back to the village on their heads. Often they were not back until noon. This they did every day.

And then I visited the villages in which a well, staffed by a little girl with a coin box, had operated for some months or years. The people there told me how their lives had been improved beyond all belief and how they were able to grow crops to add to the economy of the village. It was a very moving experience, and one that made me proud to be a Rotarian.

We only built the wells—the rest they did for themselves.

How did it happen? It happened because Rotarians thought of it, and the Foundation funded it. It happened because of 1.2 million Rotarians, in over 33,000 clubs, with the courage to imagine a better future—and the intelligence, the talent, and the resources to make what they imagined into reality.

You, here, have been a part of creating that reality. Partnering with the Rotary Foundation, you have supplied a Braille embossing machine to blind students in the Phillipines and an industrial kitchen to an organization caring for street children in Brazil. You provided an extensive water filtration system serving 42 schools in northeastern Thailand—after a number of you visited the schools to determine what would provide the greatest benefits in the long run. To war-torn villages in Cambodia, you sent not only clothing, school supplies, and medical equipment, but also a physician to examine patients and train local doctors to provide continuing care. In every case, you helped set those in need down a path toward helping themselves.

I could stand here all evening talking to you about projects and programs, about lives changed and lives saved. But what it comes down to is simply something that everyone in this room knows already: that our work in Rotary is needed, that it is vital, and that it needs a strong and vital Rotary Foundation behind it.

Your task, in the months and years ahead, is to see to it that our Foundation remains strong—that it remains vital—and that it continues to grow.

I know that the Rotarian of Taiwan understand the value of their contributions to The Rotary Foundation, and have made the Foundation a priority in their charitable giving. In the 2008-2009 year alone, Taiwanese Rotarians have made fifty-four gifts of ten thousand U.S. dollars or more, totalling nearly 1.8 million U.S. dollars—as well as the numerous smaller gifts that are the lifeblood of the Rotary

Foundation. Taiwan is home to seven members of the Arch C. Klumph Society, each of whom has, individually, made a significant difference to our Foundation's ability to do its work.

We have all heard a great deal about the situation of the world's economy at the moment, and we would be remiss in thinking that we are somehow exempt from these difficulties. But the life blood of our Foundation is not large gifts from the few who are wealthy, but small gifts from the many who care. We in Rotary understand the truth of the words of Winston Churchill: "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

[Pause.]

Two decades ago, we Rotarians made a choice to give something far more important than money. We chose to give our word—our word that we would eradicate the poliovirus, and create a world free of the disease polio. We knew that with a strong Rotary Foundation, we would be able to do it. And with the help of our Foundation, we've done a very great deal.

But we haven't yet kept our word. We haven't yet made the earth polio-free. And in the words of Henry Ford, "You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do."

We in Rotary have been saying for many years that we are going to eliminate polio. It is my hope that with the help of the Gates Foundation, and our 200 Million Dollar Challenge, there will soon come a time when we will be able to say that we've done it.

Polio eradication has been part of Rotary for decades now. We talk about it, we work toward it, and we've raised money for it—a great deal of money, over more than one campaign already. And now we are asking our fellow Rotarians, and being asked ourselves, to do and to give more.

We recognize that there will be those who feel that they have given enough to the cause of polio eradication—those who feel that we have done enough, and that it is time to move on. To those I say, that if we pause, if we slacken now, if we say that almost is the same as did—we risk losing all that we have already done and all that we have already given. We risk our own good name, and the good name of all the Rotarians who came before us. This is something that we as Rotarians cannot and will not accept. We are in this until the end—until we succeed.

For when we succeed—as we will—we will have made the world a safer place for generations to come. And we will have earned for Rotary the reputation we are determined to deserve.

I am confident that all of you will be part of the success of our Foundation in this Rotary year. I know that each one of you recognizes that *The Future of Rotary Is in Your Hands*—and the future of our Foundation, as well. But if you want to leave your footprints in the sands of time, don't drag your feet.

Thank you.