Incoming President's Address

- Fellow Grays Rotarians and guests - I am pleased to welcome you our "Club Assembly" meeting. I would particularly like to extend a warm welcome to Past District Governor Neil Muir, who is here today on behalf of Roger Harste, Assistant District Governor for Area 3 within District 1240. (I'm quite sure that each and every one of you was well aware that Grays lies within Area 3.) Roger is unable to attend today for personal reasons and Neil has kindly agreed, at quite short notice, to stand in for him. Neil is here to check on the health and wellbeing of our club, to listen to and comment upon our recent activities and achievements and to our plans for the future, and also to tell tales to District if he thinks we are doing it all wrong. But don't let this put you off - when you give your reports, tell it as you see it.

- A Club Assembly meeting is primarily concerned with looking ahead to the new Rotary year but, in the committee reports, there is also an element of looking back, reviewing our successes and learning from any failures. Before we proceed to address these matters, I would like to congratulate Peter Minter on completing a fine year as President and on leaving the post with the club solvent and in robust health. Thank you also to the other club officers for their invaluable work during the past 12 months. I hope that this year's team will do as good a job and that we will help the club to move forward in strength.

- When this address is finished, we will hear from our committee chairmen who will outline their plans for the next year. This will give Roger food for thought and something to report back to District but before that it is my turn to say something so, as incoming President of this club, I am grateful for this opportunity to outline some of my aims and aspirations for the forthcoming year.

- Let me immediately say that I do not envisage wholesale change of the club, nor of the way in which the club is run - if a club is entering its 87th year of existence, its foundations must be strong and the fundamentals of operation are likely to be sound. So - no massive changes. However, there will be some tinkering around the edges and some small differences in the events we put on. In a moment I will talk more about our club but I think it is appropriate to start off by introducing this year's themes for Rotary at National and
International levels as I hope that we will be able to interlink our club activities with these themes.

- Our RI President for 2016/17 is a gentleman called John F Germ - a member of the Rotary Club of Chattanooga in Tennessee, USA. The name is quite apposite as he is also the chair of the International PolioPlus Committee, clearly a delightful demonstration of the power of *nominative determinism*. It will, therefore, come as no surprise to hear that the RI theme for 2016/17 is "Rotary Serving Humanity" and that, as well as making efforts to provide clean water to under-developed communities, the campaign to completely eradicate polio figures highly on this year's agenda. I believe that our club events can easily accommodate support for RI's global aims.

- I am aware that our International committee is already looking at the possibility of funding a clean water project so I will leave it to the International Committee Chairman to explain further and to develop that initiative but clearly we are already working along the right lines.

- Whatever else they decide to do, I would like our Fundraising Committee to consider organising an event in support of the polio eradication programme, possibly to coincide with or tie-in with (as it's a Monday) World Polio Day on 24th October 2016.

- Our District has adopted many of these RI aims including the clean water and polio themes so supporting these projects would, for a change, make us good boys and girls at District. District has also suggested support for Medicine Sans Frontières and we have already discussed this issue.

- At club level, there are many things that we do of which we should be proud and which I think we should certainly continue:
  - our Christmas collections, both out on the streets with the sleigh and at our local supermarkets, not only raise valuable funds for our supported children's charities but also provide a massive boost to the club's profile and public image.
  - our annual Christmas concert raises a large sum for our Charity Fund whilst also contributing hugely to public awareness of our club and Rotary in general. Most importantly, however, it is a joyous celebration of Christmas which allows us to showcase local musical talent and provides enjoyment to many hundreds of local residents. (And where else could the Grays Rotary Club Male-Voice Choir have got a gig?)
  - KidsOut is an event which we have long supported and which I would like to see continue but our Youth Development team have been brilliant in extending our outreach to younger people and I wish to encourage their work with the "Youth
Speaks" and "Mathletics" projects as well as with the new project they are cooking-up and which no doubt, they will outline in their own report.

- our support for our immediate locality through the work of the Community Services committee is always thoughtful and generous and I hope that we can continue in this vein.

- our club social life is active and fun - I hope that the International Committee continues to organise our internationally-themed evening meals out and that the Club Service Committee will continue to organise the 5th Thursday events, President's Lunch, Summer Garden Party etc. I am also keen that events such as the Mystery Trip and the Stratford Shakespeare Weekend should continue if their organisers are willing.

**What could we improve?** I would like to see the club give consideration to developing and extending our fundraising capacity; our Christmas work is very successful but so successful that I feel we have come to rely upon it as our sole annual source of charity funds. Maybe it is time to change this mentality? I would like the Fundraising Committee to look into the feasibility of organising a summer fundraising event next year, not only to swell the coffers but to keep our community profile high and to dispel the notion amongst the public that Rotary only comes out to play once a year. Rotary is for life, not just for Christmas.

**What could we change or stop doing?** There are a few events that we could consider amending. This year's Burns Supper was considered a success by those who attended but it was quite hard work drumming-up the support necessary for the evening to be enjoyable and financially viable. We had already canvassed opinion about whether to continue this event when we were informed of the break-up of our usual Scottish band so this is probably an appropriate time to try something different. Health-related circumstances being as they are, weekends away are not hugely popular with The Boss so I would like to drop the President's Weekend from this year's calendar. We could try moving the Burns Supper closer to St David's Day and re-branding it as a President's Evening with a switch in emphasis from Scottish to Welsh cuisine - if there is such a thing (but please, no lava bread).

**Finally, let us not forget that Rotary is supposed to be fun - there is no shame in that.** The ideal of service is absolutely worthy and is the reason for doing what we do but a valuable by-product of service is the fellowship generated while performing it. Over recent years, attendances here have been slowly declining but our club meetings, committee meetings, activities and social events are not peripheral to Rotary, they are central to it; the lasting friendships formed in Rotary are one of the strengths of the movement, helping us to achieve what we do. We are not an e-club - personal attendance is important and strengthens the bonds between us. This year, I would urge us all to come to lunch, attend
committees, walk with the sleigh, collect at the supermarkets, enjoy the social events. Give personal attendance a high priority. Participate - you will enjoy it!

- These are my thoughts about where we are and where we are going and you've heard quite enough of them. I would now like to sit down and let our committee chairmen speak.