

Speech to the Eastern Hutt Rotary on 17 October 2022 by Sir Anand Satyanand

Thank you for the kind welcome. Nga Mihi o Te Po. Tena koutou katoa.

President Kathy Bryant, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Eastern Hutt Rotary Club here in Avalon. The place has a resonance for me as I am another Wellingtonian who, for some reason, gets bushed when coming to the Hutt. I am grateful for the very precise road instructions you provided, Kathy, that Susan and I made it here to Taita Drive and this pleasant suburb, the name of which (Avalon) has a hint of Hollywood and California, such notion being added to of course by the television and film studios of past years.

My place to stand, arises from what is now a long standing membership of more than twenty years of the Rotary Club of Wellington. I have never held any office in the Club, above foot-soldier member, and that has been by choice, despite the prospect of advancement having been on offer more than once. I have however lived a life that has involved association with the Rotary organisation at a number of levels – including joining the Club President's father, former Rotary International World President, Bill Boyd, as a joint patron of Rotary in New Zealand's Mana Tangata centenary project last year. This has included opportunities to be part of Rotary meetings, with Clubs, Districts and Zones as a speaker or presenter in New Zealand, and some Pacific territories. I have also observed at first hand the profile of Rotary in some Asian settings, such as Mumbai in India.

I remain a warm supporter of Rotary's approach to gather in people of all kinds for fellowship, and to work on projects that benefit others in the community, who are not so well off and deserving assistance.

Having stated my credentials, this brings me to my first waypoint which is to point to a number of aspects which are changing in our organisation. I am a colleague and supporter of 21/22 District Governor – former Brigadier Mark Wheeler, a member of our Club, who has been working hard on substantial governance and structural change in the wider organisation.

I have long been of the view that Rotary's governance needs attention and to say that the structure which suited our country in the 1960s is no longer fit for purpose. Having started in 1921, Rotary grew in a remarkable fashion to a point where in the 1960s there were more than 12 000 members and as many as 250 Clubs spread throughout the country with some links into parts of the South Pacific. It was said that the penetration of Rotary into the New Zealand community was amongst the highest anywhere. This needed 6 Districts to conduct its work. An analogy with the motor industry is perhaps suitable. A number of New Zealanders will agree that the very best Holden vehicle was the 1964 EH model which was assembled and sold not far from here and found its way into many New Zealanders' garages. Times were to move on and cars like that came to be replaced with others, many from Japan. Motorists' tastes went for more confined vehicles like the Toyota Corolla and Honda Jazz that we see in such large numbers today.

New Zealand society also changed in the time under scrutiny. People of our parents' age went to Rotary in those years when Rotary was a source of social interaction, but also of information and reliable advice about new developments in services and products, and new ideas. Along has come since, electronic media in multiple channels, as well as computers and the internet and social media. The iphones that many of us own, have similar capacity to active computers. This has a result that the first port of call for information about facts like the capital of Sri Lanka or advice

about how to open a stuck jar or a photograph of the Prime Minister are most easily available as we say “on line”, and in many cases in our hands. The need for Rotary has diminished.

Along the line in this new world, Rotary in New Zealand, it can be argued, has perhaps lost the trail. There is no longer any discernible surge in the community, of prospective Rotary membership. Many Clubs today have to try hard to gain even four or five members a year. We have a case of many Rotary Clubs ruing the days of yesteryear and facing the present with diminishing numbers and some degree of understandable concern about the future. The same goes for Districts and for the country as a whole.

My second waypoint is undertake some analysis of the predicament. New Zealand is a small country of 5 million people. It is similar in size and population to the Republic of Ireland which also has 5 million people. So far as Rotary is concerned, it has been operating for about the same time. However, Ireland has one District covering the country (1160), whereas New Zealand has six. (9910 and following). There is no mechanism for Rotary to have a national profile for the work it does.

Although it seems a good yardstick to say that every Club’s membership needs to have 25 or 30 people to achieve satisfactory forward motion, there are many Clubs which have fewer than that. This leads to the observation that New Zealand has too many Clubs that are too small, too many Districts and an insufficient national profile. Rotary has fractionated itself unnecessarily.

I mentioned the work that Mark Wheeler is undertaking at the moment. Already the two South Island Districts are going to become one in the course of this year. Amalgamation of North Island Districts is also under way. I am one of those who have argued that Rotary needs to have a similar profile in the public mind to the Automobile Association, the CTU, and the St John Association.

My third waypoint is to look at the future years and to see what they may offer for Rotary members ahead. I have five things to portend for the future, some of which require development.

First is use of technology. Many of us will have had experience of Zoom technology as an alternate when pandemic restrictions meant that we couldn’t meet face to face. It seems to me that there are many other uses of the technology to have joint meetings with other similar sized Clubs in other parts of the country and indeed in other countries.

The second is connection with the physical environment. We all know of the challenges of Climate Change and of the necessity implied by the United Nations sustainable development goals. Rotary has a number of programmes of tree planting which could lead the entire community by example.

The third matter is Rules – of which Rotarians are knowledgeable. Many Rules are no longer suitable for the 21st century – limitation of businesses and professions for example. If there are sufficient accountants or Bridge players, or cricket followers wanting to have a Rotary Club they should, in my view, be encouraged to do that.

Fourth, is the matter of membership. We have had a hundred years of individual membership and it seems timely for the organisation to examine the benefits of having husbands and wives as members as a matter of course should they wish. Another notion is that of Passport Clubs where the emphasis is on participation on a broader basis than just weekly connection with one Club. Passport Clubs have meetings with a variety of formats, and can meet less frequently than every week, and can focus on providing service rather than just gathering.

The fifth and last notion is Governance and eventually points to the idea of there being one person elected for a year who would be the National New Zealand President and who would speak for Rotary and Rotarians, for example in heading disaster relief efforts by Clubs nationwide.

I want to emphasise that these five items do not mean that I am suggesting that we pull the tent down. Rather, it is the opposite, with each step being grounded in the non-partisan and non-sectarian ethical guide for Rotary and Rotarians, the Four Way Test – is it the truth, is it fair to all concerned, will it build goodwill and better foundations, and will it be beneficial to all concerned?

I want to end by reflecting briefly on the large number of New Zealand organisations that have benefited from association with or support provided by Rotary. I am not going to list them all, but reference to CCS Disability Action, Asthma New Zealand, Cure Kids exhibit household names in the health area to which can be added Defensive Driving, the Dame Malvina Foundation for advancing New Zealand singers and musicians, Outward Bound and Probus. All are things from which Rotary can take pride. There is everything going for other organisations to receive first due diligence and then an association with the Rotary of the future.

I want to thank you for your courteous attention and to say that I am willing to pay the price for having been provocative by endeavouring to answer any questions or comments that any of you might have.

Kei nga mihi atu. Tena Koutou Katoa.