

African Perspective

CAN THE ROTARY FOUNDATION SURVIVE?

I walked down the road the other day to pick up my daily newspaper. R2.50 (\$0.40) lighter I settled down to read it. A feeling of utter irritation came over me. Each page proclaimed the usual gloom, death and political obfuscation that we have become so accustomed to in the media; there was nothing to elevate and amuse. In disgust I flipped the paper into the nearest garbage bin.

"What a waste of time," I thought. I might as well have just taken my \$0.40 and thrown it into the street where it may have done some good by providing a few crusts of bread to a hungry street child.

And then I started to do a little calculation. Ten daily newspapers a week plus two at the weekend amounted to R35.80 (\$5.50) a week. I was spending R1,861.60 (almost \$300) a year on something that within a few hours ended up in the trash can.

Later that same day I watched a video of a project that won an award for World Understanding and Peace at the San Antonio Rotary Convention, called "Children of the Dump." It was a Rotary Foundation film about children who, to survive, inhabit the refuse dumps outside the city of Chinandiga, Nicaragua. Covered with festering sores, walking through clouds of flies, competing with dogs for food scraps and plagued with digestive ailments, the children contrive to scratch out an existence searching for food that others have discarded. It told of how Father Marco Dessy, a local priest, and the Rotary Club of Humble Intercontinental, with imagination, determination, and with the help of The Rotary Foundation, turned the situation around and now are providing hundreds of these children with nourishing food and an educational opportunity in a safe, caring environment.

Then I remembered that three years back I received a notice from The Rotary Foundation headquarters about the need to cut back on Matching Grants and to suspend 3-H Grants because money used to support these programs had been so depleted they the Foundation could no longer sustain the requests for help that were pouring in.

On reflection I realised that this did not represent failure, but success. It was precisely because Rotary Clubs throughout the world discovered, like the Rotarians reaching out in Nicaragua, that with the help of The Rotary Foundation they can make a real difference; that they had the power to change the lives and circumstances of the poor; that no matter how small their club and how lacking in local funds, they can make a significant impact on poverty, disease and ignorance.

Because Rotarians suddenly knew how to access money there has been an incredible increase in applications for Matching Grants; 49% in the past year alone. Since 1996 the number of applications in one year has grown by 460% from 929 to 4,255.

Unfortunately the amount of giving has not grown apace. The goal for 2002-2003 was US\$88 million (\$73 per capita,) an increase of some 20% over the previous year. In 2003-04 it is \$105 million (\$87 per capita.) The Trustees, realising that even this increase will not enable the programmes of The Rotary Foundation to resume at full power, have set a goal of \$120 million (US\$100 per capita) for 2004-2005, Rotary's centenary year.

What has all this to do with the price of my newspaper? When I looked at the giving performance of our districts I found that while Rotarians worldwide are productive in finding projects and do superb work among the poor, their performance in helping replenish the funds of The Rotary Foundation falls far short of the Foundation's need to spend them. Sometimes this is understandable given local circumstances in countries where fundraising is difficult. Unfortunately, to this day there are Rotarians, and even clubs, that while they are able, to their shame, never give.

I discussed this problem with Trustee Sonny Brown on his recent visit to South Africa. I said that I needed to find a way to touch the hearts and generosity of every Rotarian; to help them bring the Foundation immediately to mind as soon as they hear the word "charity". He agrees with me that Rotarians are basically very charitable and given a good reason, would give. How to get Rotarians to understand the relationship between giving service and raising money for the Foundation? Sonny referred me to PDG David Wastchak of District 5290, founder of the Centurion project of The Rotary

Foundation.

Dave, a national advisor for the Permanent fund, and Meritorious Service and Service Above Self awardee, devised a plan in 1992 during his year as governor that sought to encourage every Rotarian to make a contribution to The Rotary Foundation; our very own charity. He called it Centurion because its goal was to encourage Rotarians to give personally at least \$100 to The Rotary Foundation each year. That's R2.16 per day (US\$0.27); less than the cost of your daily newspaper, half the cost of what we throw into the trash can every day of our lives.

I believe that this is a concept with which Rotarians everywhere can live. Let us challenge ourselves to go to bat for The Rotary Foundation and score a century each and every year. Become a Centurion and receive the recognition of your Foundation as a sustaining member of the Paul Harris Society. Help make your club a Centurion club by raising its per capita contribution to \$100.

Score a century for The Rotary Foundation and help save our Foundation programs. Without your philanthropy, the programs of The Rotary Foundation would cease to exist. 3-H Grants would not exist to provide food for the hungry, build shelters for the homeless or give medical treatment to combat disease. Matching Grants would not exist to sink wells for clean water, alleviate hunger, provide life-saving equipment to hospitals and clinics, help the deaf hear and the blind see, or promote literacy and appreciation of the written word. Ambassadorial scholars could no longer help build a more peaceful world through international study. Group Study Exchange teams could no longer travel, build friendships and exchange ideas with people in other countries. All of these programs live off the resources of The Rotary Foundation -- our charity.

Through these and other programs The Rotary Foundation supports the efforts of Rotary International in the fulfillment of the Object of Rotary, and the achievement of world understanding and peace through local, national and international humanitarian, educational and cultural programs.

Sign up now and send in your charitable pledge, not only to save The Rotary Foundation, but also to keep it strong so that Rotarians can fulfill their purpose as Rotarians.