

Diversity-A Rotary Core Value
Delivered at the Club's weekly luncheon
by Karen Kerry
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Of Rotary's five core values, diversity may be the most difficult to achieve and/or assess. But following in the Socratic tradition of self-examination, today I want to spend some time worrying about where we stand with respect to that cherished ideal. Keep in mind Malcolm Forbes' definition of diversity, which is "the art of thinking independently together." In the case of Rotary, we are nations and clubs with differences. These differences don't make us weak, rather they are the source of our strength as we rally behind the Rotary commitment to "Service Above Self."

Back to self-examination, firstly one needs to make the age-old distinction between perception and reality. With respect to perception, and with nothing more than anecdotal evidence, it seems we may fall way short. I have personally heard, and suspect many of you may have heard similar echoes, that our club is "nothing but a bunch of rich, old, white guys." In particular, we are people who have become successful and now we have committed ourselves to more altruistic ambitions.

Fortunately, perception can be overcome by factual evidence. But even before we assess whether our club is actually diverse, we need to get a better handle on the concept of diversity itself.

For a moment, let's go back to the beginning. Paul Harris, Rotary's esteemed founder, was explicit in his pursuit of diversity. He said in his book, *My Road to Rotary*:

"Perhaps the most unique feature of Rotary is its so-called classification plan by which membership is restricted to one representative of each business and profession.

The question is often asked; "why do Rotary clubs limit membership to one man from each distinct business or profession?" Because our experiment has proved in operation that it makes for congenial fellowship, obviates business and professional jealousies, encourages mutual helpfulness, stimulates pride in the dignity of one's occupation, and broadens one's mind and sympathy with regard to the accomplishments and problems of other occupations."

Today, I think we all would agree that, although his desire was commendable, his concept was somewhat anemic. Diversity in our vocations is only one aspect that we should consider for membership in Rotary.

It is not just the jobs we have that make us different, but the places we live, the education we've had, our ethnic heritage, our physical appearance, our religious beliefs, the languages we speak, our thoughts and feelings, our abilities, and our challenges.

So where do we stand on these different dimensions of diversity? Let's just spend a minute on the data.

With respect to diversity of occupation, Paul Harris would probably not be proud of our classification analysis, as our Club boasts an abundance of dentists, bankers/financial planners, non-profit sector members, and even Kerry's. With respect to age, the median age in Ann Arbor is 27.9, the median age in Rotary is 65. Ethnically, Ann Arbor is currently 15.2% Asian. Although Sang and Tony Nam are colorful and vocal contributors to our Club, two of three hundred and ten members is only about .7%. On the gender front, Ann Arbor is 50.6% female, and while new member classes in our Club boast

significantly more women, we are still only at about 30% in the Club.

Thankfully, although the quantitative study is insightful, we shouldn't spend too much time with it, for it misses the point.

If our club were a perfect reflection of our community, if we had the same percentage of women, the same percentage of blacks, the same percentage of Muslims, as our surrounding Ann Arbor community, although we should be happy with that genetic makeup, we should be far from satisfied.

And that is because diversity is not just statistics, rather, it is an attitude. To paraphrase the founder of the world-wide web, Tim Berners Lee, "It is diversity of thought in the world that will help us face the new global challenges--whether it is world understanding, goodwill, or peace."

Quoting an age-old proverb:

Diversity begins with the acceptance of differences between people and culminates in their celebration.

We may at the end of the day fall short on our numbers, but if this is the kind of Club that celebrates our differences, and I think that it is, we should all feel proud. There are many threads woven into our Rotary fabric, and we remain strong in our goal of "diversity in thought and unity in action."