

Introduction to Rotary Club of Madison Culture, Equity and Belonging Initiative Presented at luncheon -- August 13, 2025

Message from Anthony Gray, Board President --Opening Remarks & Vision

Good afternoon, Rotary Rotarians,

Today, we officially start a new chapter in our Rotary journey—one dedicated to strengthening our club's culture and increasing the sense of belonging among all members. This Culture & Belonging initiative isn't about fixing Rotary. It's about investing in its future.

Our Four-Way Test encourages us to ask: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all? This initiative offers a way to live those values more fully and consistently.

We recognize that members bring a variety of perspectives and experiences. That diversity is one of our key strengths. Some believe our culture could be improved; others question whether this should be our main focus. What unites us is a shared dedication to Rotary's impact and purpose.

This initiative aims to ensure that every member—regardless of background or tenure—feels respected, engaged, and connected. It focuses on building a Rotary that stays relevant, welcoming, and strong in the years ahead.

Thank you for being part of this important next step.

Message from the DEI Committee Co-Chair Sedrick Page -- Background & Evolution

Thank you, and good afternoon, Rotarians,

The DEI Committee was established to help our club embody Rotary's core values—service, integrity, leadership, and fellowship—by intentionally emphasizing equity and inclusion. From the start, this effort has been about strengthening Rotary, not changing it.

Over the past few years, we've worked together on speaker programs, partnerships, and initiatives to boost member engagement across different backgrounds and perspectives. We also heard from members—especially newer or historically underrepresented members—who haven't always felt fully included.

That's why this Culture & Belonging launch is so crucial. This isn't just a DEI initiative; it's a Rotary-wide commitment to creating a club where every member feels valued and empowered to contribute.

We appreciate the support of club leadership, committee partners, and every member who shows up with curiosity and care. This is not a finished product—it's a shared process we are launching together.

Message from the Ethics Committee Representative Bob Shumaker -- Linking Belonging to Rotary Values

Thank you, and greetings Rotarians,

Rotary has always maintained high ethical standards. The Four-Way Test and R-O-T-A-R-Y Framework for Ethical Decision-Making are more than just guiding principles and what we teach at the Rotary Ethics Symposium. They help make this organization trusted and respected.

The Culture, Equity and Belonging initiative is deeply grounded in these same principles. It encourages us to consider carefully how we treat each other, how we respectfully communicate about difficult issues, how we lead, and how we respond when someone feels excluded or unseen.

Let me be clear: belonging doesn't mean we all have to agree. It means we lead with respect, and we make sure everyone has a voice. That's not a new expectation—it's a deeper expression of who we already say we are.

Culture isn't just about what we believe—it's about what we do. This initiative encourages us to keep growing as a community rooted in fairness, compassion, and accountability.

Please let me know if these revisions are acceptable.

Thank you.

Message from the Consultant Debbie Biddle -- The Path Forward & Invitation to Engage

Thank you, and hello, Rotarians.

As both a Rotary member and your consultant for this work, I want to thank you for your openness. Over the past several months, I've heard a consistent theme: People join this club because they care. They stay because they want to be part of something meaningful.

Culture is shaped every day by how we show up for one another. It's in our conversations, our meetings, and our shared service. That's why this initiative is not a policy or a training. It's a launch—a new commitment to shaping the future of our club with intention.

I recognize that some have raised concerns about my dual role as both a consultant and a member. That feedback is valid. My role in this process is to listen deeply, guide objectively, and support your leadership in building a club culture that reflects the best of Rotary.

In the coming weeks, you'll hear more about opportunities to get involved, and ways to provide input. This is not about perfection. It's about connection. It's about care.

Thank you for the trust, the challenge, and the opportunity to move forward together.

Closing – Anthony Gray, Board President -- Summary & Next Steps

Thank you to all of our speakers today. You've heard from multiple voices, and I hope it's clear: This Culture & Belonging initiative isn't about changing who we are—it's about affirming who we aspire to be.

In the coming weeks, we will start a phased approach to our work, focusing on rebuilding trust, enhancing our club's cultural competence, and creating a sustainable strategy for inclusion and belonging. This includes: a reconciliation process with schools impacted by the 2025 Ethics Symposium incident; specialized inclusion training for Rotary volunteers who work with youth; and co-developing a long-term, club-wide inclusion and belonging strategy rooted in Rotary values.

This phased approach is created to tackle immediate concerns while integrating long-term practices that foster cultural awareness, accountability, and inclusive engagement throughout the club.

You will also get today's messages emailed for further reflection.

Remember: this is a launch, not a one-time event. Let's walk this path with the same dedication we bring to every Rotary service project— with curiosity, generosity, and shared purpose.

Thank you.