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September 29, 2020

Dear Optimist Family,

As we prepare to end the 2019 to 2020 Optimist Year, I want to take a moment to say thank you to each and every one of you for your focus and commitment to strengthening our organization during this first year of the next century of service of Optimist International.

In Louisville at our Convention, I asked you to iMagine! A simple theme, but with a big meaning.

I asked you to iMagine how we could see this organization in a new light. How we could reimagine the financial, marketing, and operational platforms of Optimist International to allow it to be the premier youth-serving organization in the world!

I told you there were six steps to my plan:

- 1. Governance and Financial Stability**
- 2. Marketing and Public Engagement**
- 3. Convention**
- 4. Leadership Development**
- 5. Sense of Purpose**
- 6. Digital Transformation**

Each one of these steps is supportive of the other designed to make us a Stronger, More Resilient, Highly Focused organization that to the needs of our membership and responds to the challenges facing our children and the communities in which they live.

I am pleased to report that we have made significant progress during this year, despite the issues that we have faced.

As it relates to the first step of Governance & Financial Stability, your Board of Directors focused on the following issues:

- Review of the Optimist International Organizational Structure and Administration (ROOSA) led by Past President Bob Garner and includes an outstanding team of Optimists from throughout our organization.
- Federation Pilot for St. Lawrence region
- We analyzed and audited the strength of each District and ranked the Districts in positions of strength using given criteria. The results were not flattering and it has shown that one of our greatest vulnerabilities as an organization is our District Structure.



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- We reviewed, updated, and enhanced our bylaws and board policies and it is hoped that in 2021, we will bring a number of bylaws revisions to the International Convention.
- We have put in place an investment and advisory committee to explore ways in which our organization could develop significant passive income to mitigate the risk of our current income being 98% dependent on dues from you the members.

Our second step was Marketing and Public Engagement. We have made significant strides in this area:

- We hired a dedicated Social Media Manager to buttress the work of our Marketing and communications department.
- We have seen our social media engagement almost double across all media.
- We have approved a Social Media Policy to mitigate against global trends of misuse and other illegalities related to intellectual property, content, and distribution.
- We have had a significant increase in direct inquiries about our organization because of these activities.

The Third Step was revamping our Convention.

We had a successful Virtual Convention by all accounts. We were able to expose the convention to almost 1,700 people, with over 500 first timers.

Leadership Development was our fourth step:

- We have expanded and conducted our Webinar series and other online meetings for our membership and staff and I am pleased to report that 1,800 attendees participated in the various fora. Many of our members, young and old, took advantage of the times to learn new skills, especially as it related to video conferencing, etc.
- We instituted a new platform called President to Presidents, where I had the opportunity to speak to over hundreds of Presidents and strengthen their knowledge of the administrative side of the organization and receive questions and feedback directly from the clubs.
- Our Governors and VPs benefitted from a revised training module which was less focused on growth but more focused on empowerment and how they could lead to improve member satisfaction and fulfillment in the organization. The primary goal was to improve our levels of member retention, and I am thrilled to report that we have moved our retention of members up 4% points as of the end of July to 88%!
- Finally, we introduced a Learning Management System which many of you have heard me call the Optimist University. This initiative has seen almost 500 clubs (20%) sign up within the first week of launching the platform on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The demand has been extremely high and we have just created a model to expand this to general members and not just our leaders.

The fifth step is our Sense of Purpose. This focuses on Who we are. What we stand for. What we do.



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In all of my public communications, I like to reinforce that we are a global organization operating in 28 countries in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Central America, South America and North America. I reinforce that we positively impact the lives of over 6 million children and the communities in which they live. I focus on the \$78 million dollars spent by a network of 2,500 clubs. **Why do I do this?** Simply because it reinforces that who we are and what we do is making a difference in the communities we serve.

Our Board has further approved new programs and activities that will give a freshness to our clubs as they execute new programs in their communities.

Digital Transformation is our final step on the ladder.

With the support of the Board, we have put in place a number of initiatives that have allowed us to continue to develop and expand the capacity of our beloved organization. They include:

- Purchasing and implementing a Learning Management System to facilitate the Leadership and Personal Development of our members.
- Webinar modules focused on using new technologies.
- Development of an Organizational App for Smartphones.
- Development of a new Website hopefully to be completed by the Fall of 2020.
- Improving our administrative human resources to better manage the integration of technology in what we do.
- Introduced a new digital version of our magazine which created savings of tens of thousands of dollars while improving our distribution and communication.
- Responded quickly to challenges by having these platforms of technology available to us. This was particularly seen with our recently concluded World Oratorical Contest.
- Launched our OptiForum events platform to respond to topical issues facing our members and the constituents we serve.

I posit that these six (6) steps I have taken the time to report to you here and the positive affirmation we have received from our membership are positive indicators that we are moving in the right direction, and it gives me even greater joy that we have done it together.

We did it with the Fierce Urgency of Now as Martin Luther King Jr once said. We iMajined and We Believed! We have created a positive and vibrant environment that erased any sense of self-doubt in our capabilities!

We must continue to be adaptable, to quickly find solutions and serve our communities. Millions of children sleep better, learn better, live better because of the golden touch of the hands of Optimism. In every single corner of the earth, they are adults living productive and positive lives because an Optimist impacted their lives.



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It was an ambitious Board agenda, but I personally believe that working with the Board and Staff of Optimist International that we were able to substantially tackle the aforementioned tasks.

I would like to personally thank my amazing team of Vice Presidents and Governors who have used their collective wisdom and individual creativity to find new ways to lead during the pandemic that threatened to derail our plans. You have done well, and I know that our members are appreciative of your leadership!

I would like to thank Benny Ellerbe and the entire staff of Optimist International in St. Louis and Montreal for their support of the Board and for the countless hours of participation in meetings supporting the Board, its committees, and the members.

I am comfortable that, in spite of the disruption of the COVID 19 pandemic we did our best to keep the organization alive and our membership engaged. I am truly humbled by and appreciative of the support and the professional and respectful manner in which our Board allowed me to lead this wonderful organization.

I now invite all of us to renew our commitment to this organization by Choosing Optimism and supporting our colleague and friend Mark Weinsoff as he assumes the Presidency on October 1, 2020. President Mark has been a fearless defender of Optimist International and the principles that we stand for. He has been an active part of the senior leadership for the last two Boards and was involved in every key decision made. I encourage the new Board and our entire membership to support him and his leadership as we move forward with greater confidence to Bring out the best in our Children, our Communities, and our Members.

Yours in Optimism,  
**OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adrian M. Elcock".

Adrian M. Elcock  
President 2019 to 2020