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March 22, 2020

My Fellow Optimists,

There is a Barbadian saying that goes “These days are funny nights”! I am not sure if the origin is Barbadian but it is something that I grew up hearing.

It is a saying that we use when things are so askew that we do not know if it is day or night. That’s how I felt over the last three weeks while leading this organization in the environment of unprecedented changes to our global landscape because of the novel coronavirus- COVID19.

Working closely with our Board and our Staff we recognized early that the virus had the potential to significantly disrupt our operations and a decision was taken by the Board to immediately put our members on notice and prepare our staff and headquarters to continue serving our membership.

Over the last few weeks, you would have received numerous communications from our Headquarters providing guidance to our members on their personal health and safety, meeting protocols, and projects and programs. Our intent was clear...COVID 19 is something that had the potential to impact us all in a very negative way and we needed to be focused and deliberate in how we prepared for it to ensure the safety and well-being of our members, our staff, and the communities that we serve.

With no end in immediate sight, and with world leaders declaring National Emergencies in their respective countries, it became clear that our organization had to take additional steps to protect the organization and its members and staff. As your International President, I and the Board of Directors, have made the very difficult decision to cancel our 2020 International Convention in Chicagoland. We have further decided that other large gathering activities sponsored by Optimist International would have to be cancelled or reimaged. As such, the Board has decided that we will also cancel the Junior Optimist International Convention and our Junior Golf Championships in Miami, Florida. We will also not host our Optimist Oratorical World Championships in St. Louis but, if practical, we will execute it as a fully online competition.

Our priority is the health and wellbeing of our Membership, Staff, the communities we serve, and those who participate in Optimist International events. All of us are susceptible to becoming infected; however, many of our members fall into the most vulnerable or high-risk categories as defined by the Global Health Experts. As an organization dedicated to health, we do not want to put any of our members, staff or friends in harm’s way. With our membership and competitors



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distributed throughout the world, we also face many uncertainties regarding travel restrictions and violation of laws.

To say that I am not devastated would be an understatement. This has been an extremely difficult period in my Presidency witnessing first-hand how our organization has been affected by this Global Pandemic called COVID-19. However, I am buoyed by the amazing support that I have received through prayer, our Board, our Staff, and our members. We have tried our best to replace uncertainty with certainty; to remove the pall of darkness and replace it with clarity of focus; and to remove pessimism and replace it with unbridled optimism.

It is Optimism that requires me to implore you to remove the veil of darkness and replace it with an armor of light. To see opportunity when others see threats. To reimagine our wonderful organization and prepare you to find new ways to carry out the work we have been called upon to do. We are not canceling Optimism. We are canceling some events to keep our Optimist Family safe. Optimism cannot be defeated. We are iMaging new ways to bring you imaginative and exciting programs during this time.

We are Optimists! Remain active in your communities. This is a time for Optimists to shine. It's a time to re-iMagine how we serve our communities and those who reside in them. We might have to cancel our gatherings but we do not have to put a hold on our good deeds. It's time to put our minds, hearts and souls together and find ways to bring optimism and service to our neighbors.

Thank You!

Yours in Optimism,

Adrian M. Elcock  
**President**  
**Optimist International**