



KIWANIS BECOMES AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

For almost half a century, the debate over Kiwanis expansion persisted. In September 1922, the Executive Committee discussed the question of “extension work policy for territory beyond Canada and the United States.” Letters had been received about forming clubs in Manila, the Philippines; Honolulu, Hawaii; Havana, Cuba; and Mexico.

The views of Kiwanis on the question of extension (or “Foreign Extension,” as it was called for many years) were sharply divided. Some Kiwanians believed the philosophy of the organization might be altered in those countries whose social, economic, political, or religious traditions were strikingly different from those of Canada and the United States. This group also feared that new clubs in even carefully selected countries outside the two founding nations might have to be supported indefinitely by clubs in Canada and the United States. Other Kiwanians felt the benefits of spreading Kiwanis’ service work throughout the world would be enormous. When they insisted that the international extension of Kiwanis could make a real contribution toward the preservation of world peace, few Kiwanians argued.

In 1952, another study was reviewed concerning all possible advantages and disadvantages, but the committee’s final report still recommended “holding to current policy.” Then came the first real breakthrough for the proponents of extension.

In 1959, the committee closed its report to the Board with the following statement: *“We hope that it may be a measure of conviction to you as it has been an example of inspiration to us that we have come to the unanimous, sincere, and*

unalterable conclusion: Kiwanis not only should, but must, grow and serve by going toward new frontiers.”

To the average Kiwanian, this statement might have seemed to settle it all: Extension beyond Canada and the United States would begin immediately. The struggle over policy and procedure was long and at times bitter. The opponents of any new type of extension raised all kinds of questions: Do we not need Constitutional amendments? How can the organization be certain its philosophy and programs will not be diluted or even destroyed? What will it cost every member in new dues to support any such plan? How will Kiwanis ever solve the obvious language problem? These vital questions were faced every step of the way toward the development of a successful plan for international extension, and the path was rocky. The input from questionnaires and all other methods of communicating with leaders did not produce an answer to a simple question: How?

Finally, in 1961, at the International Convention in Toronto, Ontario, the delegates were asked to vote on one of the most important resolutions ever presented in the history of Kiwanis: “Resolved, we favor the establishment of Kiwanis clubs in other countries in addition to Canada and the United States; under due safeguards fixed by the Board of Trustees of Kiwanis International.” When the votes were counted, the extension delegates had won: 2,394 delegates supported extension; 1,762 opposed it. Though the resolution passed with votes to spare, the “how” still had to be determined, and some of the arguments that proponents had used to support the resolution returned to haunt them.

On May 15, 1962, the Kiwanis Club of Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico—the first Kiwanis club organized outside the United States and Canada - received its charter. The Tijuana club was formed under the generally agreed-upon plan of affiliation and was attached to the California-Nevada-Hawaii District. But the discussion over extension procedure continued among the Board members, with suggestions on how best to organize and administer clubs outside of Canada and the United States coming from throughout the organization. As new areas were opened to extension by the International Board, discussion intensified.

By the time of the International convention in Los Angeles in 1964, 10 extension countries had active Kiwanis clubs: Mexico, Switzerland, the Bahamas, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Iceland, Japan, and Jamaica. By the October meeting of the Board, there were 25 extension clubs organized and the Board voted to adopt the federation plan as set forth in the policies governing the organization and administration of Kiwanis clubs outside of Canada and the United States. Thus, the federation plan came to be mandatory. To implement this action, the name and emblem were to be registered in Europe and a corporation established in Switzerland to further protect the interests of Kiwanis International.

Over the years to come, it became obvious that such a plan did not represent a viable worldwide procedure. Rather, extension procedures could take a group of clubs in any one area up to the point of their being formed into a strong district. At such a stage, all departments of the International Office, trained to give continuing service as clubs are formed,

assumed their overall role of handling all aspects of the new district's needs, giving it the same service and attention as all other long-established districts. It is at the establishment of the strong district that such clubs were no longer extension clubs, but rather full-fledged members of the total organization. Extension then opened new regions for growth, looking toward the time when such areas also will reach district status.

In reality, this whole development is a slow process. The organization, 46 years old before it entered the worldwide scene to develop new clubs and increasing membership, must and will take its time in reaching logical and clearly defined operational procedures to make the total organization increasingly international in character. Further evidence of this is found in Constitutional and Bylaw changes that clearly spell out internal relationships and define day-to-day decision-making about the organization's future structure. It is most interesting to observe that over the years and variety of changes in administrative procedures never have reduced the impact of clubs' services to their communities; their projects continued to provide needed services to youth and to many others. Some changes have had an effect upon the structure of Kiwanis International and the methods by which its International Board is selected to govern the worldwide organization.

Today, Kiwanis has more than 90 nations that continue to strengthen the bond between Kiwanis and the entire world. Regional Service Centers exist throughout the world, to assist clubs and leadership in Kiwanis.

Source: *Dimensions of Service, The Kiwanis Story*
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