

PEOPLE

CHINESE DREAM | GARY C.K. HUANG

HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED

President of Rotary International says giving back makes you 'a better and happier person.'

By LIU XIANGRUI
liuxiangrui@chinadaily.com.cn

When Gary C.K. Huang joined the Rotary Club 32 years ago, he never imagined that he would become the president of this international organization. Nor did he think much about the charitable services to which it's committed.

"I thought this club has important and successful people. I wanted to be part of it because it would be good for my business," says Huang, 69, current president of Rotary International and a member of the Rotary Club in Taipei.

He was right about that. But it was committing himself to the charitable endeavors later that has given him the greatest sense of achievement and satisfaction, says Huang, the first Chinese to be elected as the head of this century-old organization, which was founded in Chicago in 1905. On a recent visit to the mainland, he shared his stories and visions for the club at a Beijing Rotary Club event.

Rotary International is a service organization that brings together business and professional leaders in order to provide humanitarian services, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world.

There are more than 30,000 clubs and over 1.2 million members worldwide. Club members, known as Rotarians, usually meet weekly for breakfast, lunch or dinner. These are social events as well as opportunities to organize work on service goals.

Huang still vividly recalls how he started thinking about Rotary service in the wake of a terrible typhoon.

When one of his fellow Rotarians told him about an orphanage building outside of Taipei that was devastated by the storm, Huang drove with another Rotarian there to give aid.

He was shocked by the poor conditions of the buildings, home to about 60 kids. The orphanage didn't even have enough money to buy diapers for babies, he says.

"I tried for a few minutes to imagine my children living in this place. But I didn't imagine it for too long. I didn't want to even think about it. Instead, I said, 'OK, we have to do something here.'"

The Rotarians not only fixed everything damaged by the typhoon, including the roof, the kitchen and the walls, but also bought a refrigerator and an air conditioner. They also created a fund to buy diapers for the babies, Huang recalls.



KUANG LINHUA / CHINA DAILY

Gary C.K. Huang is the first Chinese president of Rotary International that has more than 1.2 million members worldwide.

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China already has so much business and so many entrepreneurs. Rotary is a way for successful people to make a difference. It is also a way to help people who need it. We have millions of intelligent, creative people. Why would China not want to have them working for it, for free?"

GARY C.K. HUANG
PRESIDENT OF THE ROTARY CLUB

"This was more than 30 years ago. But for me, it was the beginning of Rotary," he says.

"I learned what Confucius was trying to teach me. Helping others is also helping yourself. It changes who you are. One thing you learn in Rotary is that if you find you have a little extra — more than you need for yourself — you enjoy it more when you share it. It makes you a better and happier person."

A graduate of Eastern Michigan University and holder of an MBA from the College of Insurance in New York, Huang has worked in the security business all his life.

Huang resigned his other positions to fully engage himself in the Rotary Club after he was elected as its president.

Huang was born in southern China's Fujian province and grew up in Taiwan. Huang has traveled to the mainland many times for

his business.

His relationship with Rotary clubs on the mainland began a long time ago, when he delivered the provisional club charter for the Beijing club when it was established 19 years ago. "It was a big honor for me," he says.

Huang is eager to establish more clubs and attract more members in China. He is also working hard to make Chinese one of the official languages for Rotary, which he believes will both attract more Chinese to the club and make the club more open to Chinese communities.

The first thing he did as president was approve 10 more provisional clubs in China. The organization is now applying to establish Rotary clubs in several Chinese cities, including Chengdu and Tianjin.

"To increase our membership, we must go beyond borders to where

ever we see growth potential, such as the countries of China, Mongolia and Vietnam. I will put an emphasis on increasing female and younger members," Huang says.

Rotary clubs in Beijing and Shanghai have been involved in charitable programs including disease prevention, education and aid for women and children, according to Piper Tseng, president of the Rotary Club of Beijing, which has about 50 members.

For example, their Gift of Life project has helped fund the treatment of more than 440 children in China with congenital heart diseases, Tseng says.

Huang hopes the current club members in China will build a positive public image for Rotary so that China will become fully open to it.

"Rotary is only going to be a good influence for China," says Huang, who is impressed by the fast growth

in the past few decades and believes Chinese people are ready for Rotary.

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Huang's efforts in humanitarian service have had profound influence on his family: His wife and three grown children are also Rotary members. They often share their experiences and discuss the community services their clubs provide, Huang says.

"We do Rotary work together. Then doing good becomes a family event," he says.

Mike Peters contributed to this story.

Church greets female leader with hugs and support

By RACHEL L. SWARNS in New York
New York Times News Service

Two days after she officially assumed the mantle as the senior minister of Riverside Church, the Rev Dr Amy K. Butler, the first woman to hold the job, was chucking on the couch of her 19th-floor office in the church's Gothic tower in Morningside Heights.

War stories? Does she have any war stories? Well ...

There was the man in New Orleans who, after hearing Butler's first sermon, announced that watching a woman preach was akin to watching a dog walk on its hind legs. There was the hospital security guard in Washington who insisted several years ago that she must be a sickly congregant's girlfriend, not his pastor, until she directed him to her photo on the church's website.

Then there was the day in June when Butler arrived at a funeral home in Maryland, ready to lead the worship service for a grieving family. She tweeted about it afterward: "Trying to convince the funeral director

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REV DR AMY K. BUTLER
FIRST WOMAN TO HOLD THE JOB
OF SENIOR MINISTER AT RIVERSIDE
CHURCH

that you really are the minister never gets old."

That might be one reason the installation at Riverside Church last week felt so special. In that ceremony, Butler formally took on the role of leader of one of the nation's most prominent liberal Protestant churches. And there were no wide-eyed stares, she said, no raised eyebrows, no gasps of disbelief.

Instead, there were hugs and handshakes from congregants and an outpouring of emails and phone calls from female ministers and seminarians, all applauding the rise of Butler, a 44-year-old single mother, to one of the most venerable pulpits in the country.

"People ask me, 'How much resistance was there?'" said Butler, who moved to New York in August from Washington, where she had served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church for 11 years.

"And I tell them, 'I have not had any,'" she said. "I have not had any resistance at all. This congregation has just embraced me with open arms."

Change is happening and not just

at Riverside, the 84-year-old church whose pastors have championed issues of social justice and drawn luminaries such as the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela as speakers.

Two other women have been chosen this year to lead large, prominent congregations for the first time: In Chicago, the Rev Shannon Johnson Kershner now presides over Fourth Presbyterian Church. In Washington, the Rev Ginger Gaines-Cirelli holds the reins at Foundry United Methodist Church.

"What's notable is that it's happening all three at the same time, all three in major urban areas, all three in historic churches," said the Rev Dr Serene Jones, who hosted a dinner recently in Butler's honor and is the first female president of Union Theological Seminary. "It's fantastic."

At Riverside, Butler has already begun transforming the senior minister's role with her informal, pastoral style.

Sermons, which once lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to 40 minutes, now run about 15. And she eschews

traditional formalities: don't call her Dr Butler. She considers herself as Pastor Amy, a shepherd on a shared spiritual journey with her flock.

"I am honest about who I am, about the pain I carry in my life," said Butler, a divorced mother of three, who has spoken frankly about her personal struggles and theological uncertainties. "I see the church as a place where we walk together through some of the hardest things in life."

In recent years, Riverside's divided members have struggled to walk together.

"Everybody has their feelings about how things should be, and they don't always agree," said Dr Billy E. Jones, a psychiatrist and longtime church member. "The issue is how do you pull all that together in one congregation that moves forward? That has been a struggle."

And running an institution as big as Riverside will be no small challenge for Butler: In Washington, she presided over a church with about 300 members, 12 employees and a \$1 million budget. Riverside, by contrast, has roughly 1,900 members,

about 150 employees and a \$14 million budget. Her salary is \$250,000, the same as that of her predecessor, the Rev Dr Brad R. Braxton. (His salary became a flash point during his brief tenure; it has not been an issue for Butler.)

But membership and revenues are down, and some of the internal tensions that led Braxton, Riverside's last senior minister, to resign in 2009 after less than a year still smolder.

The congregation, which is about 60 percent African-American, has been divided in the past along racial lines. Butler's two predecessors were African-American, and she knows that the fact that she is not has raised concerns in some circles.

But she certainly has firsthand experience in bringing together diverse groups. At Calvary, Butler, whose father is native Hawaiian, more than doubled the size of her congregation, melding the separate Spanish- and English-language services into one and creating a multiethnic community of worshippers.