

What Lions Are Not

Fifty years after the first Convention in Dallas, Edward M. Lindsay, the Golden Anniversary President of Lions International, realized that the best way to define Lionism was to explain what it was not. In an address delivered to the annual U. S. State Department Foreign Policy Conference for Nongovernmental Organizations, President Lindsey said.

We are not a political organization, yet among our members will be found leaders of all political parties and factions. Our Constitution prohibits activity in a partisan political way, yet it carries a positive mandate that each club should provide a forum for the free and open discussion of all matters of public interest.

We are not a social club, yet we are directed to take an active interest in the social welfare of our various communities, for only in this way can we realize the full potential of our influence in developing the moral fiber of our societies.

We are not a fraternal organization, yet we have found that men of all faiths, all religions, all nationalities, all races can come together in an aura of mutual understanding, resulting in strong bonds of friendship and good fellowship.

We are not a youth organization, yet Lions Clubs sponsor more Boy Scout troops than any other organization. We participate in so many youth programs and projects in this nation and abroad that it is hard to determine if the dog is wagging the tail or the tail is wagging the dog.

We are not a welfare organization, yet over the years, in good times and bad, countless thousands of less fortunate people have been the recipients of the generosity of Lions. Whenever human suffering has been found, the flexible purposes of Lionism have made it easy for Lions to respond generously and with open hearts.

We are not a sports or recreational agency, yet thousands of boys have been thrilled with Little League programs and many other activities built around the training of the minds and bodies of our youth, both boy and girls.

We are not a religious body, yet the precepts we live by are familiar to the doctrines of the world's spiritual bodies, and the motivation of our activity, resulting in thousands of complete projects, is deeply rooted on the age-old philosophy of "Love Thy Neighbor," found in some form or another in the dogmas of all religions.

We are not a medical or health organization, yet our clubs have performed miracles in this wide panorama of community and individual service.

We are not an educational foundation, yet thousands of students are today in schools built by Lions. In Mexico, for example, almost a thousand public schools have been built and equipped by Lions.

And there is another thing we are not: we are not a United Nations. Yet we are an instrument of peace. Lionism, born while the world was aflame, has grown strong under the nourishment of freedom and liberty, and the effort for peace which we intend to make will be directed along those traditional concepts, for we believe that there can be no meaningful freedom without peace and no lasting peace without freedom.

Some fainthearted ones may say, "Why are you doing this? Why do you think Lions International should attack this problem when even great and powerful nations have failed through the ages?" Our answer is simply this: "We are not so naïve, so immature, as to think our effort alone will unravel this tangled mess, but we are confident we must make the effort. We must make our contribution, and so must you."