

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE IN THE YEAR 1957

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Atlanta, Ga.

Introductory Remarks

THE official life expectancy of the President of this Conference is predetermined. No sooner does he become familiar with the inner workings of the organization, its internal structure and operations, when he must begin preparations for his exit. He enters like a lamb, but he goes out like a lion.

All the Committees, their reports and all other projects have deadlines. They are geared toward the climax of the Annual Conference which provides the terminal facilities.

The Conference is a continuing body and is a democratic organization. Presidents come and Presidents go, but the Conference remains. So waiting a year is not too high a price to pay.

As a certain rabbi once said, "Ours is a democratic congregation. Shul Presidents come and go every two years. But the Congregation remains. So we wait until a new President is installed."

In keeping with the spirit and mood of the present times, your President wanted to be President. He assumed he was President. But in reality he was a part-time President. The staff of the Conference carried the load. The failures belong to the staff. The successes of the year go to the credit of the leadership and wisdom of the President.

And now for some of the highlights of the accomplishments of the Conference during 1957, and some of the unfinished tasks and problems which the incoming administration will inherit. I trust that there will be a certain carry-over and continuity in policy and decision.

Policy Making and Administration

The governing body of the Conference is the Executive Committee. All policy decisions are made with the advice and consent of the Committee. The administrative implementation of the decisions are in the hands of the Executive Secretary. It is he who gives stability and continuity to the work of the Conference. He has performed his duties ably and well.

Membership

It has been said that the heart of any organization is its membership. The officers and the staff are but the arms and legs of the body. I can report that the heart of the Conference is in good working order and the blood stream is sound.

The Membership Committee, under the leadership of Jack Gold and Jack Zukerman, has functioned throughout the year. The two of them have pursued their tasks patiently with persistence and perseverance. I believe that the results, in the retention of individual and organiza-

tion members and in the enrollment of new members, are good.

Conference Finances

As our Treasurer has reported, we are solvent plus. In accounting terms, our assets are greater than our liabilities. Our income will exceed our disbursements. We can, of course, strengthen our financial position by increasing our money reserves.

The Conference Program Committee and all its sub-committees have worked hard to prepare an interesting, balanced and professionally worthwhile series of presentations and discussions for your edification, stimulation and enjoyment. I believe they have succeeded. Our appreciation goes to Irving Greenberg, the General Chairman, and to the Chairmen of all his sub-committees.

Internal Structure

During the past year a special committee on Internal Structure, with Maurice Bernstein as Chairman, was set up to study Conference procedures, to clear up ambiguities, uncertainties, and practices with regard to committee appointments, and to take a special look at the functions of the Editorial Board. I believe some loose ends have been tightened. The Editorial Board is a policy making body which should enlist the full participation of all its members.

The *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* is a professional journal of recognized merit. The editor and his associates have functioned competently. The JOURNAL reflects great credit upon the professional interests of the Conference and its membership.

It is my thought that this Special Committee on Internal Structure should be continued and given the opportunity to review further present procedures of the Conference and bring our By-Laws into harmony with our practices.

Perhaps this Committee might also be commissioned to overhaul the Conference program of Public Relations. Our publicity is anemic. The interpretation of Conference aims and activities requires a more consistent follow through on a continuing year-round basis, rather than on an improvised, quick concentration of deadlines necessitated by the demands of the annual Conference meeting.

The N.C.S.W.

Our Conference is an associate group of the National Conference on Social Welfare. Our relationships with the latter have seldom been clear or consistent. A special committee, under the chairmanship of Ben Sprafkin, has initiated an exploration into this area of relationships. I believe the Committee has just begun its work. I would strongly urge the continuance of this Committee so that it may be enabled to probe deeper into the problems of mutual interests as well as differences and come up with a workable plan which could be pursued more consistently and effectively than heretofore.

International Jewish Social Welfare

The Committee on International Jewish Social Welfare, under the Chairmanship of Hy Sainer, has continued its concern with the building of a greater awareness on the part of Jewish communal workers in this country of the existence of Jewish Social Welfare in other areas of the world, especially in Israel; of the professional problems which confront Jewish welfare workers in those countries; and how the Conference can give practical implementation to this concern and awareness.

The Special Oneg Shabbat, on the Emerging Jewish Community in Latin America, was a product of the Committee's interest. This Committee is also spearheading the Conference interest in

promoting the Summer Workshop in Israel for Jewish Social Workers from this country, which has the cooperative sponsorship of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

This is an opportunity for personal stimulation. It is also a means of setting up a two way learning process where American and Israeli social workers can get to know each other, establish a clearance of ideas and institutional processes, and be helpful to each other in effecting an understanding of purposes and aims peculiar to each country.

The question of the reorganization of the International Conference of Jewish Social Work has again been brought to the attention of some of the members of this Committee. It is a matter which should receive the serious consideration of the Committee during the coming year.

Jewish Communal Archives

Jewish Communal Archives have again found a place on the agenda of the Conference. Our past President, Charles Zunser, has taken the lead in urging the professional and lay leaders of Jewish communal work throughout the land to be mindful of the significance of the preservation of historical materials relating to persons, places, and organizations which have anything to do with the Jewish Community.

Conference Annual Award

The question of the desirability of creating a Conference Annual Award, on a permanent continuing basis, for the paper representing the best professional contribution to Jewish communal work, was referred to the Kappel Award Committee, of which Max Stern was Chairman.

The Committee met a number of times to consider the eventuality of an award after the money in the Kappel Award Fund is exhausted. It made a unanimous

recommendation to the Executive Committee that such an annual award be continued.

The Committee felt that an annual award will further the objectives of the Conference in the following ways:

1. "It will give recognition to an individual member of the Conference for outstanding and distinctive work.
2. "It will help make a contribution to professional practice in any given field of service included in the Conference.
3. "It will emphasize the Jewish dimension in social work.
4. "It will have a beneficial influence on professional practice in the field as a whole."

I should like to endorse the recommendation of this Committee and suggest that this annual meeting of the membership of the Conference approve it and authorize the Executive Committee to find ways and means for its implementation.

Conference History

The History of the Conference is in the works. I trust that before the year ends it will see the light of publication.

And now I come to the two committees which I regard as basic to the continued effectiveness of the Conference—one relating to the Conference and its associate groups, and the other concerned with the professional training for Jewish Communal Service.

Conference Relationships with the Associate Groups

A Committee, known as the Liaison Committee, under the chairmanship of Walter A. Lurie, has kept a watchful eye on relationships with our Associate groups, who constitute the life line of the Conference.

This is the first time, in some years, that all the Associate groups are meeting under the same roof. The Committee has been emphasizing the concept of one,

overall Conference of all those engaged in Jewish Communal Service.

During the past year the Committee has prepared a Code of Relationship with the N.A.J.C.W., which is a codification of existing practices. It is now before the Executive Committee of the N.A.J.C.W. for consideration and action.

I venture to make two comments regarding this Code of Relationship or subsequent codes which may be prepared pertaining to the status of the Associate groups, of the National Council for Jewish Education and the Association of Jewish Community Relations Workers.

The Codes should be made known to the entire membership and be approved at the annual meetings of the Conference and of the Associate groups. The detailed implementation of the codes could then be left to the respective Executive Committees.

The provision requiring three months written notice for the termination of the agreement should be reviewed in the light of present cooperative relationships, and changed to one year. Three months is too short a period. If exercised it would disrupt violently the operations of the Conference. The Liaison Committee is to be commended for the fine cooperative relations it had established with all the Associate groups. They are in the best interests of the entire field of Jewish Communal Service.

Training for Jewish Social Work

In my judgment the Conference Committee on Training should be accorded top priority in the activities of the Conference.

From the first annual meeting of the Conference to this very day, training of professional personnel for Jewish social work has been a major interest and concern of the Conference and its members. The two other major problems which agitated the Conference in its early years

were transients and the National Transportation Agreement, and the development of a field service in the area of community organization.

The Conference has played a role, and I like to think that it has been an important role, in the formulation of every training program for Jewish Communal Service.

From in-service training to the organization of Institutes and short term courses, to the creation of a graduate school for Jewish Social Work and to the formation of the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service, the Conference has been an enabler, a stimulator, and at times served as a catalytic agent in goading individuals and communities into positive action. At every stage of the development of a training program there were ifs and buts, ideological doubts and substantial reasons for inaction. But the pursuit of positive objectives overcome obstacles and resulted in affirmative action. Unfortunately all the training projects were comparatively short-lived.

We are again in one of those periods in American Jewish Communal life when the need for Jewish professional leadership, educated in generic social work, trained in the special disciplines, imbued with the spirit of Jewish learning, is item number one on the agenda of every Jewish community.

There is a shortage in professional personnel in all fields of community endeavor. Case workers, group workers, community organizers, social planners, social researchers, are wanted everywhere. But we have a special concern for the Jewish field. There is a dangerous shortage in Jewish teachers and educators. Boldly and openly we admit that we are worried.

The Conference Committee on Training is in good hands. Its chairman, Dr. Maurice B. Hexter, has shown a consistent interest in education for social

work over these many years. The subject will be further discussed at this Conference.

Let the Conference mandate to this committee be clear and unequivocal. In cooperation with all our associate groups, and in response to the will of our general membership, it is urgent that the Conference and its Committee on Training exercise leadership in stimulating the development of a program of Education for Jewish Social Work which will help meet the immediate needs, and will assure, on a permanent and continuing basis, the professional manpower requirements of Jewish Communal Service in this country.

Major Developments in Jewish Social Work

The foregoing review of the project commitments and activities of the Conference is based on the acceptance of the assumption that they merit the whole-hearted support of the members. It will be the task of the incoming administration to give leadership to their implementation.

I have been asked by the General Sessions Program Committee to add to this report a brief review of major developments in the field of Jewish Communal Service for the past year. It is not my intention to present a comprehensive summary nor to add a lengthy and scholarly discourse on the many controversial issues in Jewish Social Work which were on the agenda for the past year and which remain unresolved.

I should like to present some general observations on these developments, from the standpoint of the reactions of the Jewish community.

Peter Goldberg's article on Jewish Communal Service, which appeared in the 1957 edition of the American Jewish Yearbook, gives a fairly comprehensive review, in authentic facts and figures, of current developments.

The article stresses the importance of

community organization for fund raising. It analyzes campaign results. It answers the question of fund raising for whom and for what. It points up some of the shifts in emphases of specific local programs. It is in regard to the latter that I should like to make a few observations.

In the sessions of the Conference and its Associate groups we discuss for the most part what lawyers might call substantive issues. They are in the realm of theory, process, techniques, goals. The practical issues of fund raising, changes in financial support of agency programs are discussed in other forums. And yet proper financing and proper allocation of funds are at the root of many of our local community problems.

It should be pointed out that marked changes are taking place in the financial support by Jewish communities of local health and welfare services. This is especially true of the large cities.

In family agencies, counseling has replaced a former major preoccupation with economic assistance.

In child care, dependency is no longer a major reason for receiving service. Orphans and dependent children no longer crowd our institutions. In fact such institutions have virtually disappeared from the scene of the local operations. The conflict between institutional and foster home care is but an historic memory. Shades of Elias Trotsky and Ludwig Bernstein.

Today Jews are prosperous and economically secure. And with prosperity and financial security has come emotional insecurity. The password at the intake desk is emotional disturbance.

Children's institutions are now resident treatment centers for the emotionally disturbed. Our knowledge of modern psychology and psychiatry have completely changed our programs of child care.

I have often wondered whether the

patterns of modern living and the communal institutions to which we must adjust may not in part be responsible for some emotional disturbances in many cases. I have often been tempted to inquire, "chas vi chalele," whether there can be such a thing as a sociology of emotional disturbance.

The extension of Jewish financial support in this area of service is fraught with frustration. The creation of resident treatment centers for children on a local level is well nigh prohibitive as regards cost and staffing. I wonder whether we have exhausted the consideration of other forms of care and treatment. Is it heresy to inquire that there may be such a thing as the current style and fashion in child care that we have not given sufficient attention to the possibilities of developing and instituting other forms of care and treatment?

The care of Jewish aged has become a top priority in many communities. We are all getting older if not wiser. The programs of Homes for the Aged have been modernized, streamlined and air conditioned.

A Home for the Aged is no longer regarded as an "hekdesch." It is no longer regarded as a place for the poor only. It has become quite fashionable to have an aged member of one's family apply for admission and pay the full cost of care. Case work, occupational therapy, and recreational programs are part of the life of a good Home.

We have just begun to devote attention to the development of non-institutional services for the aged. The over emphasis at present has been on modern institutional facilities. But, Jewish Community Centers, vocational service agencies, and family agencies have come to realize that there are limitations to building programs and waiting lists. In cooperation with the institutions these agencies are beginning to pool their resources,

to cultivate a bold, imaginative approach to the problems of the aged.

Modern case work services have but recently come to a status of acceptance and recognition in the Jewish community of the intermediate and small size. Pure counselling unrelated to concrete services is still a luxury.

The standards of public assistance in these communities are still low and inadequate. The Jewish agencies have to provide some form of supplementation and a variety of other services. Besides, the average Jew still believes that the Jews take care of their own. He is reluctant to refer a Jewish client to a non-sectarian or public welfare agency.

The intangibles of case work relationships are a mystery to him. He knows that when a Jew is in trouble you send him to the Federation office for help. And if he does not get help but an interview, he wants to know why. Selling he understands. But talk as a form of help he fails to accept. "Un fun dos macht sie a leben?"

The status of the professional social worker is an important part of the development of local communal services in the intermediate and small communities.

The Jewish teacher lacks tenure and social acceptance as part of status. The professional social worker may have acquired greater security as regards tenure. But his status otherwise is far from good. This has an important bearing on the development and support of communal services.

Population shifts are much more significant in the larger communities than they are in the intermediate and small communities. There is one consolation which may be offered to all those who are terribly concerned about the suburbs. If enough Jews move into any suburb and they increase and multiply, "um yirtzeashem," God willing, they will develop all the Jewish complications which may be found in the metropolitan areas.

The development and support of Jewish education have not gone forward with any degree of "deliberate speed." The National Commission for the Study of Jewish Education is making a real contribution by its series of local community studies. But rabbis and congregational leaders have been reluctant to accept the concept of community responsibility for Jewish education. As in many other phases of Jewish Communal Service, here too, vested interests and lack of cooperation have hindered and slowed down development and growth.

Fund raising for overseas and national needs can not be divorced from local developments in all the areas of local service.

The crisis in Israel and the impact of developments there are certain to have a profound effect on local Jewish Communal Service in every Jewish community throughout the land.

A preoccupation with individual therapy may be very important. But I believe that a concern for social therapy is also important. I am very much concerned about the social forces in the general community. But I am particularly troubled about the social forces in the Jewish community.

My plea, along with Helen Harris Perlman, is for putting the social back in social case work. I should also like to see us put back the social in group work.

We must respect and make valid use of psychiatric knowledge. But we must also respect and make valid use of social knowledge. We must rediscover social knowledge. We must rediscover the social sciences. We must rediscover the implications of the total community environment upon the lives of children.

As Jewish community workers we must rediscover the effects of the Jewish environment—the home, the synagogue, the Jewish school, the Jewish center, the Jewish club and other Jewish communal institutions upon the lives of our children as well as adults.

There has taken place a significant development in providing modern facilities for Jewish centers. But facilities alone—no matter how modern and beautiful—are not enough. It is program which makes the difference. And program implies the acceptance of certain values.

As professional social workers we have commitments to standards of integrity and technical competence. We have also commitments to the concept of community.

As Jewish social workers we have added commitments to return to the sources of Jewish learning; to find motivations for practical social action in the moral and ethical foundations of our faith. We need the courage to stand up for what we believe to be right. We need the wisdom to influence our community leaders to join us in the great adventure of Jewish, creative living.