JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICES; VALUES AND CHANGE—SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS *

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THE field of communal service deals primarily with people and their needs. This is generic to all of its specialities. Our focus is on serving clients, members, pupils, residents, patients—as individuals and in groups. Even in the discipline we call community organization, the major focus is on raising funds, budgeting, and planning in order to raise the standards of service to people. Our concern with ideology, where we have it, has been secondary. We need to remind ourselves of this focus on people and the way they live when we consider Jewish education and cultural programs. We assume that healthier better adjusted, better educated people make a better community and that a better community is one in which people have fewer problems and adequate services to help solve them.

This is the third annual Conference in which we have dealt so searchingly with the larger scene—with Jewish life itself. We heard some basic overall presentations which have served as background for group discussions from which, in turn, we try to draw some general observations.

At the 1958 Conference the basic presentations were made by an economist, a rabbi and a federation executive who had done a lot of thinking on the philosophy of our programs. In 1959 these basic presentations were made by a federation executive, an administrator of a national non-sectarian agency who is in a position to approach the basic problem from a general community as well as a Jewish community point of view, and a veteran social worker with a group work-Jewish education background.

The objective of the sessions this year as in previous years has been to examine three elements of concern: (1) a changing world; (2) the American Jewish community's relationship to this change; and (3) values and practice in Jewish communal service against the backdrop of this larger social picture. This describes the starting point of our joint consideration—formal and informal. The end is not in sight. In fact, we find a virtue in such continuing explorationwithout end. To help us examine developments in the Jewish community we looked to leaders in social research, Jewish education and the emerging field of Jewish culture. For evaluation of what this means to us as professionals, we must each share the responsibility as practitioners based on the formulations so ably presented.

Throughout the Conference deliberations there has been a conscious effort to bring society, Jewish values, and community service into some balanced sense of interaction so that we can understand them better and do our work more effectively. There is a kind of omnipotence associated with the idea that we, the communal workers, can shape the destiny of Jews and of the Jewish community by creating the appropriate instruments. It is not only more modest but more realistic to formulate our thinking somewhat differently. The Jews who live in our communities, if they are healthy, prosperous, well-adjusted people will want Jewish education and cultural programs. Our job is to provide these services. Our primary focus, by virtue of our training and our professional tradition, is on people and the development of their full and rich potential. We have demonstrated some resistance to the idea of deciding in advance what is good for them, whether it be Jewish education or a particular brand of Jewish education. There is a subtle difference between orienting and dedicating ourselves to service to people and devoting ourselves to programs that have been pre-determined as desirable.

Our Conference in the structure of its programs and in the increasing interrelationship and integration of the fields of service which it embraces has recognized that we must avail ourselves of the skills and the best thinking of the educator, the social scientist, the psychologist—the practitioner in every field that deals with people. There is a general acceptance of the principle that to serve our people we must have a continuing Jewish community which not only serves but is enriched by each generation.

Dr. Fishman, in his paper on the "Emerging Picture of Modern American Jewry" makes this point regarding creative Jewish survival when he says-"We may not wind up with a pattern in which element X or element Y is guaranteed. However, I do believe there are good chances of winding up with a pattern that will be basically positive to meaningful Jewish existence as well as supportive of those who seek its full creative development." Our Americanized middle-class educated Jewish community warrants the inclusion of opportunities for creativity and enrichment along with our concern for problems and their prevention.

In the three major presentations which we have heard, an attitude is revealed toward the organized Jewish community which is encouraging. We seem to have gone beyond the conception of the Jewish federation, or welfare fund, as a Jewish money barrel or a Jewish Ford Foundation which is to be used by all who can find favor to advance their own particular interest.

Our central concern is increasingly with the development of a sense of Jewish community. It is to this objective that Jewish federations, welfare funds and workers in the field of community organization have dedicated themselves. It is an objective traditionally important in Jewish life and of multiplied importance for Jewish life in an America where Jews are increasingly like their neighbors.

The organized Jewish community is not only an instrument but an end to be served in turn by Jewish education and Jewish cultural programs and by Jewish social research which in themselves are services for the development of Jewish life. The relationship between organized community and communal programs is reciprocal. As we raise and

^{*} Major papers on "Jewish Communal Services—Values and Change" were presented at General Sessions of the 1960 Conference by Joshua A. Fishman, Albert P. Schoolman, and Judah J. Shapiro. (See pages 5 to 43, this issue) These presentations were summarized by Maurice Bernstein and discussed by Conference delegates in small groups which considered their application to professional practice. Mr. Avrunin's paper followed the group discussion, and was presented on May 23, 1960.

¹ This issue, p. 26.

enrich the standards and scope of service to Jews we strengthen the sense of Jewish community. Social workers in the field of community organization have long recognized the primary importance of community. We have been joined by our colleagues in case work and group work and community relations who readily saw the importance of elevating their particular field to a communal status. Educators for a time fought for more funds for Jewish education and for the right for these funds to be administered by segmentary or denominational groups under religious, ideological and fraternal auspices, untainted by the emerging concept of a Jewish community.

Dr. Schoolman moves forward from this position when he cites as "the most challenging recommendation in the entire (Jewish Education) Study... that Jewish education should become the concern of the entire Jewish community through the agency of federations... in similar manner and extent as such agencies are now concerned with the other services of the Jewish community." The field of Jewish culture has not yet moved to this position although its current prominence springs from the concern and sponsorship of the organized Jewish community.

It is of more than passing interest that the paper advocating greater use of social research in Jewish communal service was followed on successive days by major reports on studies in the fields of Jewish education and Jewish cultural services. We could not have taken Dr. Fishman's advice more seriously—or more immediately.

Against the background of the three basic presentations, more than 200 members of the Conference in 19 separate discussions groups engaged in intensive consideration of Jewish Communal services.

In some areas they found full agreement; in others they met with sharp differences. The task of summarizing their deliberations is far beyond my capacity. I shall try to enumerate some of the major conclusions:

- (1) There is increasing compatability between the objectives of communal service to Jews as people and the strengthening of the concept of a voluntary Jewish community. These aims complement each other to a greater degree than ever in the American Jewish community of our time.
- (2) There is room in the conception of Jewish communal service for Jewish education and cultural services along with the traditional health and welfare programs. We must exercise caution to make certain that communal auspices in the fields of Jewish education and culture does not mean the superimposing of patterns by central authority.
- (3) Inclusion of more "enrichment" services and changes in the character of the Jewish community must be reflected in changes in the priority for communal funds and in the nature of professional preparation for communal service.
- (4) The traditional services must continue to change as the character of the Jewish population changes and as its needs change.
- (5) The traditional services can be rendered more effective by interaction with Jewish educational and cultural programs.
- (6) There is an increasing basic commitment to Jewish survival on the part of communal agencies and communal workers. At the same time, there is a wide divergence of opinion regarding the specific requirements and characteristics which can be identified as positive for American Jewish life.
- (7) There is need for "independent" research which will address itself to the sociological study of Jewish life in America. While such research may be useful

to community planning, it should be separated from the study of community needs and the evaluation of the effectiveness of agency service. Research in the Jewish community can be advanced by a more meaningful relationship with universities and the academic world generally.

- (8) In the training of professionals for communal service there is not always a correlation between knowledge and commitment to Jewish life. What is needed is "not a Jewish background but a Jewish foundation."
- (9) There is general agreement on the importance of Jewish culture and the values associated with it in general. At the same time there is recognition that we have not begun to spell out its application to communal service.
- (10) Denominational differences and loyalties have created serious obstacles to the development of programs of Jewish education so they can have maximum value for Jewish living in America.
- (11) "The Jewish professional must understand the core of Judaism to avoid the frictions of denominationalism that divide Jewish life." "He must be comfortable with his Jewishness"... "He must have a knowledge of Jewish ethics and morality."
- (12) Whether in the area of case work, group work, health services or Jewish education, there is recognition that it takes a Jewish agency, staffed by Jewish workers, to transmit Jewish values.
- (13) There was ready agreement that the professional has a leadership role followed by some uncertainty as to what the specifics of this role should be. Clearly, it should result in inspirational motivation for and commitment to the values and objectives of a Jewish community. We still need to define more specifically what these values and objectives are.
- (14) Some reservations were expressed about standards for measuring the pro-

fessional equipment in the area of Jewish background. This was accompanied by a kind of fearfulness of a breakdown of objectivity required for evaluation.

- (15) "Values cannot be taught; they must be demonstrated—acted out. The Jewish values held by the professional will, of necessity, rub off on the layman with whom he is associated."
- (16) Jewish group identifications are acquired and preserved through shared, satisfying experience. Jewish-sponsored service programs provide the opportunity for such experiences.
- (17) While there is an unarticulated desire for Jewish expression and Jewish values, the Jewish community has not established the mechanism for such expression. Associated with this is the observation that second and third generation American Jews participate in Jewish communal programs on the basis of emotional identification, rather than Jewish knowledge.

This account of the points of agreement and those of disagreement could continue almost endlessly. Of even more importance was the general impression of the process of discussion. It was inspiring to see practitioners from the various fields of Jewish communal service lifting themselves above differences and specific operational problems in the search for positive, creative, common ground.

It is true that a conference, miles away from home and office, offers an opportunity to indulge oneself in theories and dreams denied by the nagging demands of daily assignments. There was an air about the discussion sessions which reached beyond indulgence. It was as if case workers, group workers, community relations staff, educators, communal workers, all together, were seeing a new high level of purpose in their routine tasks and were finding a richness in the potential of their contribution to Jewish life.

² This issue, p. 43.