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Signs of Our Times

WILLIAM J. EGAN, M.D.

THE White House Conference on Aging was held in Washington D.C. January 9-12, 1961. It was two years in planning and had resulted from an enabling bill introduced into the legislature by the Honorable John E. Fogarty, Congressman from the State of Rhode Island. In his words, "There has been a great deal of talk about aging and what we need now is action." He felt that five areas demanded attention: employment, income, housing, free time and health. He amplified, moreover, that the Conference should not be a goal in itself but a "launching platform" for new programs of action by the States and communities.

For two years prior to the national session, State delegations met and evolved recommendations. These were listed by the national committee and published in an anthology as a guide to subsequent discussions.

Delegates to the Conference were both State and national, numbering some 2,800. State delegates were appointed by the various Governors to represent all fields of service to the aged. The number of delegates was proportional

Dr. Egan, immediate past-president of the Federation and member of the Boston Guild, served as Chairman of our group attending the White House Conference on Aging.

to the population; e.g., New York and California with one hundred, ranging downward to Nevada, Wyoming, and Delaware with ten. On the national level, one hundred and fifty organizations sent six hundred sixty delegates. The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds was represented by the following committee: Dr. Alice Holoubek, Shreveport, La.; Dr. Clement P. Cunningham, Rock Island, Ill.; Dr. Gerard P. J. Griffin, Brooklyn N.Y.; and your scribe.

Names, strange bed-fellows to your chairman, listed among the national organizations sending delegates were the following:

Altrusa International, Inc. (professional women)
Distilling, Rectifying Wine and Allied Workers' International of America
Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.
International Union of United Brewery, Flour, Cereal, Soft Drink and Distilling Workers of America

These delegates sat at the conference tables with those of the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Menonite Mission Board, the Lutheran Church, and the Baptist brotherhood. The motivation of all delegates was an inspiration to behold. It could happen only in America.

The plan of the Conference was well executed. A plenary session

of all delegates opened the meetings on Monday. Then the representatives divided into ten groups to discuss:

- I. Population Trends
- II. Health and Medical Care
- III. Social Services
- IV. Housing
- V. Education
- VI. Role and Training of Professional Personnel
- VIII. Religion
- VII. Free Time Activities
- IX. Research in Gerontology
- X. Organization: Local, State, Local Voluntary, Federal

These groups were oriented by addresses from authorities in each field. The groups then divided into sections and again oriented to the problems of the respective subjects. These sections divided into work-groups of twenty members each under the direction of a chairman, associate chairman, and recorder. The work-shop occupied one and one half days. Between sessions, the recorder synthesized recommendations.

On the third day, the pattern was reversed by regrouping until the whole was reassembled with final recommendations before the plenary session. This meeting was held from 7:00 until 11:00 p.m. on Wednesday and 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. on Thursday. These recommendations will be officially presented as the net effort of many people of good-will.

A few observations are worth reporting prior to this final publication by the National Committee:

1. If no other good should result, this meeting was worth the energy expended in that it propagandized all segments of the nation to the increase in the numbers of elderly citizens and their needs in our society.

2. The sentiment of the delegates was overwhelmingly in favor of pre-payment of retirement sickness benefits during the working years. This, despite the fact that the A.M.A. bloc attempted, by parliamentary procedure and propaganda, to scuttle any recommendation along this line. A.M.A. policy-makers had such poor public relations that further serious damage to reputation was offered. The opposing factions repeatedly asked that organized medicine offer a plan more desirable than withholding under the Social Security plan, if such was possible. None was forthcoming. The platitudes and derogations by the doctors fell on mildly hostile ears, to phrase it kindly.

3. Of the senior citizens, it was shown that only six percent are pathological at any one period. Hence, the doctor plays a pro-rata role in the total care of the aging. Those involved in ancillary services proved by action and by expression that their motivation is as ethical and as Vincentian as the doctor. In fact, because these people do not have to measure their results by the labels of "cure" or "incurable" they evidenced greater hope for the comfort and the rehabilitation of the aging.

4. The common denominator of "interest in one's fellowman"

erased totally the lines of race, color, creed or political affiliation. It was a thrill to have been part of this unified Americana.

A caution should be voiced, however. One sign of these times, by inference, suggests that both national and State legislatures should enact specific laws to avoid "conflict of interests." Should fed-

eral resources become available for care of the aging, nursing homes, chronic hospitals and hostels will afford so attractive a business venture that politicians may seek to control and even to own such licenses. Advance legislation could secure to our senior citizens proper care and insure the avoidance of political scandals.

THE DRIVER'S PRAYER

Grant me, O Sacred Heart, a steady hand and watchful eye.

That no one shall be hurt as I pass by.

Thou gavest life, I pray no act of mine

May take away or mar that Gift of Thine.

Shelter those, dear Lord, who bear me company,

From the evils of fire and all calamity.

Teach me to use my car for others need;

Nor miss through love, of undue speed

The beauty of the world; that thus I may

With joy and courtesy, go on my way.

*Oh Sacred Heart, My Auto Companion,
Have Mercy on Me.*

