

# FOR YOUR INFORMATION

★ **NORTH CENTRAL AREA COUNCIL** ★  
**of Young Men's Christian Associations**

MILWAUKEE 3, WIS.  
641 N. 4th STREET

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Milwaukee 3, Wisconsin  
January 21, 1953

To: Presidents of the local Boards of Directors  
Members of the Area Board and National Council  
The General and Executive Secretaries

From: R. J. Ramser, Area Executive Secretary

Once again the book of time has closed upon the scenes and sequences of another year---the accounts have been balanced up and the record written on the ageless pages of history. Disappointments, sorrows, heartaches, failures---new friends, happy times, satisfactions in achievement, moments of reflection, meditation and dedication---all of these are to be found in the record. And here we are, a new year and a new day, the future we talked about with such great hope and expectation yesterday, last year, ten years ago!

Life that does not look forward to a future is dead indeed. This forward look has been the dynamic spirit of this great land of ours ever since the founding fathers first put foot on our soil. And now, as we begin another year, a renewed spirit of confidence, vigor and hope seems to pervade the land. There seems to be a new appreciation of the meaning of "freedom,"---freedom of worship, of enterprise and government based on the consent of the governed. Somehow the problems that seemed so hopeless to us yesterday don't seem quite so insurmountable today. Our country has a great future if only we keep the faith!

Much has been said and written in recent months about freedom. Wm. J. Grede, president of the National Council of YMCAs, who has done such a terrific job during the past year in interpreting the meaning of freedom in his travels as president of NAM, tells the story of the Englishman who visited his plant who described it as "an elusive sort of thing." Yet, out of the welter of discussions of political, economic, social and religious concepts of freedom, emerges the one indisputable truth---there is nothing mankind prizes so highly on the face of the earth as freedom. Freedom epitomizes the dignity and measureless potentialities of humankind.

In these discussions of freedom, it has occurred to me over and over again that the Young Men's Christian Association, in the area of serving human need, is a prime example of freedom at its best. The "Y" came into being in a land of free people---the product of a little group of workers who conceived it as something of a mutual aid society---to improve the condition of young men. Down through the years the YMCA idea has embraced millions of young people in many lands---a free fellowship of men and boys, and more recently, women and girls as well---who are believers in a universal brotherhood grounded in the teachings of Jesus and who, in the expression of this fellowship engage in a great variety of activities together for self improvement and for the betterment of society-as-a-whole. In these activities, free choice is the keystone. Persons choose to affiliate themselves with the Young Men's

Christian Association. They choose to be active participants in activities and program or simply to lend their names and to give such financial help to projects of particular concern and interest as they wish. Many, in addition to supporting their local YMCA, want to give funds to send worthy youngsters to summer camp, to conferences, to Youth and Government programs. Others are interested in seeing the "Y" idea brought to cities and towns throughout our own country where it is not yet established. Others see the great world-wide programs and projects of the Movement as instruments for the development of world understanding, good will, fellowship, brotherhood and peace, and welcome the opportunity to help strengthen and extend this missionary work.

It seems to me that freedom is the very essence of the YMCA idea. And yet I somehow get the impression at times that too many persons who subscribe wholeheartedly to the principles of free enterprise in the business world, overlook these same basic facts of life as they sit on Chest budget and planning committees in their communities and seek to exercise over the member organization the same brand of control and restriction which they have found so distasteful in business.

Times have changed, to be sure. The organization of community life in this day and age is indeed complex. It is a far cry from the life of a quarter-century ago, be it a city of 10,000 or 500,000. This complexity of life certainly calls for community consultation, cooperation, planning, and a degree of coordination of privately supported as well as public services. But, just as the principle of freedom to make choices, to work hard, to demonstrate initiative, resourcefulness and creativeness are sound principles in a dynamic free economy, so must these same principles be preserved in all fields of endeavor, including the field in which the Young Men's Christian Associations serve.

The high public official here in Milwaukee County who made the dogmatic statement before the Wisconsin Council of Social Work here a couple years ago that "there is nothing a private organization can do that a public agency cannot do better," has had his day. Events of these recent years have adequately provided the answer. Most Community Chests and planning councils that adopted restrictive policies governing YMCAs and other member organizations have discovered, fortunately, how unwise it is to destroy initiative, resourcefulness and responsibility; to penalize good management by such measures as deficit financing, line-by-line accounting, by usurping agency prerogatives; by establishing fixed salary and wage schedules; by preventing the establishment of adequate maintenance reserves, by refusing the right to give members the free-will opportunity of supporting special programs and projects in which they may have a keen interest.

Freedom certainly is an "elusive thing." And events of these recent years have demonstrated just how elusive it can be, and how easy it is to destroy freedom by regimentation. Just as humanity prizes freedom above all else in life, so too the Young Men's Christian Associations must ever safeguard their integrity and freedom of determination and action within whatever framework of federated planning may be established for mutual assistance and effectiveness among the voluntary organizations in the community. As we begin this new year the Young Men's Christian Association looks forward to a great future for once more, in most places, it has a future with an open end clearly marked---freedom!