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Local Secretary Reports:

Conflicting Attitudes, Overlap of Groups Detrimental to Aim of 'Y' Program

At the annual meeting of the Y.M.C.A. held Thursday, June 3, the general secretary, D. H. Schull, presented his annual address. He, his wife and their three young children arrived in Canada from Amsterdam, Holland, in August, 1963. Mr. Schull has been in charge of activities for the past year. His full report follows.

When I came to this country I knew that I had given up my position in Holland and that, doing that, I had renounced my place in the world of sports and in the educational world. And the 450 people attending my farewell meeting, coming from all walks of life in Amsterdam and Holland, convinced me that my position was worth having.

I knew also that my place in the International Y.M.C.A., with its contacts throughout the world, was gone. I knew that I would not have any staff, no personnel and a small building in comparison with the one in which I used to work. I knew that I would miss the big city life with its concerts, its plays and its museums.

Why do I enlarge upon these points at this meeting? Because I want you to understand what this Y, here in Acton, had to perform to a man who came as a stranger in their midst.

You had to receive me—and you did it full heartedly. You had to acquaint me with the Canadian way of life—and I learned it.

You had to give me the chance to adapt myself to the entirely different circumstances—and I had that chance and I am still working to use that chance.

Many Organizations
 I had a hard time to find my way about in the complicated situation in this town. First, there are the many organizations working in the social field. Sometimes they are working in exactly the same direction. Most of these

organizations are working among the people who could be members of the Y. The church is very active; young people's groups are doing the same work as the Y.

Second, there are the complications in personal relations in this town. I had to find a place among the population of Acton, for it is very important that a Y secretary knows his way in the community where he works. He has to be neutral; he has to keep a place of his own and he has to consider these relations in an academic way.

Discouraged at First
 I had also a hard time in arriving at an attitude towards the youth in this town. I had to find out what their interests were and I have to admit that in the beginning I was a little discouraged in discovering that in general youth had only very little interest in the events I considered central to Y work.

And last, but not least, I had to find out what was the place of the Y.M.C.A. in this community in order to let it work in the most efficient way. For a new general secretary this is always the most difficult problem. For everybody has a prejudiced opinion in this matter. Some will say that the Y holds an important place; others—if they are honest—will tell you that the Y has no use and is not worth spending money on.

I had a hard time to form an opinion of my own. I had to listen to voices which did not speak to me personally but to others who told me indirectly. I had to look at the faces of people who knew that I was the new Y-secretary and therefore did not say anything. I had to observe the young people and guess why they did not come, indeed sometimes even counteracted the events I organized.

I could give you a rather exact analysis of the reasons why the Y is not the central organization for youth work in this town, in spite of the fact that it has the biggest number of members of all the social agencies; in spite of the fact that the Y's Men have a prominent place in the whole district; in spite of all the work done by the Ladies' Auxiliary; in spite of the facilities which are really sufficient for the

size of this town; in spite of the financial support given by the industries and the business men and in spite of so many factors which should push the Y up to the first place.

Urge to Organize
 I could tell you that in this community there is an urge to organize so great that the agency which tries to find its way without organizing in the same level never gets a chance.

Well, we did our share. You can find in the annual report that we organized 23 special events and 25 weekly activities and you have to show me any other agency which did as much. But it explains why the attendance is relatively small. With this number of program items and members we should have had an attendance of 3000 instead of 2000 at the special events. We should have 12,000 instead of nearly 9,000 in the weekly events, if everyone who registers, would come out regularly.

I could state that in many cases there is no conviction that there is a need for a Y.M.C.A. in this town. Even people who registered as members; even people who gave donations; and even people who were members of the Board of Directors in former days, expressed their doubt.

Some Oppose Y
 I even could inform you of the fact that there are some people who oppose the Y.M.C.A. because of general reasons. Reasons of personal character; reasons of ideological or religious character; reasons of all kinds. There are Galley Two Dick Schull Talk members of social agencies who oppose us because we don't use our funds for rehabilitation of invalids; there are members of the churches who consider us with suspicion because they don't know what the Y wants in spiritual matters. There are important people in this town who think that we should join forces and have a community centre with a building which is used by all the social agencies.

I could do all this and I know that you would have to agree with me. I, as secretary, have to interpret the Y.M.C.A. and I know that the interpretation of the Y is one of the toughest jobs one can imagine. In particular it is tough for someone who is general secretary as well as program director, membership secretary and physical director.

I have interpreted the principles and the philosophy of the Y.M.C.A. in many countries. I forget the number of lectures I gave on this subject and the places where I did, are spread out all over Europe and the Eastern part of North America. But it is much easier to give a lecture to an audience and then leave than to have to realize the principles in a program.

The interpretation of the Y in this town is particularly difficult. We have to teach the youth that physical education is very important but that this is only a part of the whole. For the Y.M.C.A. is not a sport association even when it gives a fine opportunity to develop the body. It is not a church even when it tries to bring a spiritual message; it is not a school even when it introduces educational issues in its program.

Peace to Prepare
 The Y has to develop an interest of life. Interest which goes further than a gang, recreation, a friendly

circle or even one's own family. For the Y has to be the place where youth is prepared for future life.

I have experienced in my own life how important the Y can be. And when you ask me how the Y did it I could not tell you. But I know that my life would be much poorer, if I had not experienced the fellowship, the sincerity, the fun, the sports, the summer camps and everything I had in my boyhood and during my adolescence. Not everybody will be influenced by the Y.M.C.A. as I was. Fortunately not, otherwise there would be too many Y secretaries. But if only a couple of boys who were in our classes during the last season, learned something which they can use in their future life; if only some adults got a better insight into matters of youth... well, then we can be satisfied; our work has not been for nothing.

The most difficult thing is that the Y does not have a starting point in the usual sense of the word. We can not use slogans to make the Y easy to digest. We cannot say "Join the Y and be a champion" or "Be a good Y member and you will earn eternal life." There is no basis for the Y in science, in creed, in race, in nationality or in consideration of life in politics or in society.

It comes in contact with all these facets of life; it is related to them; it has to apply its possibilities; but there is no real basis in the human society which gives any foothold to start with.

There is only one starting point for the Y. This starting point is Jesus Christ.

Not a Service Club

That's why the Y.M.C.A. is not a service club. The Y.M.C.A. tries to bring to the youth in more than 80 countries the meaning of being a human and a child of God at the same time. The Y does not abandon the human character in young people and does not try to make saints out of them. We know that every man is human and makes errors from time to time. It does not reject the human society, but accepts it with all its weaknesses, all its strength and all its needs. The Y does not point to something which has been 2000 years ago and will be in an indefinite future. There is no story of Jesus Christ in history and there is no heaven in future. Jesus Christ lives now; and heaven and hell are here now. When you have your eyes open you will see them every moment, everywhere.

The Y tries to acquaint youth with his world in this way. Not by pulling him away from it; but by telling him that there is some other world, but by guiding him through this world and no other.

And that happens in India and China; in universities and in grade schools; on the front lines of Korea and in the sports arenas in metropolises, in factories and in department stores.

Y is a Mission

The Y.M.C.A. is a mission. Sometimes it is a real mission when it works in Asia and in Africa among people of other faiths. Mostly it is a mission among the indifferent, the uninterested, the spiritual slow pokes.

Every Y member who understands this is going to cooperate with this basic aim of the Y. Don't let us think that we are ready when we consider ourselves Christians, just because we are members of a congregation by faith. A

Christian who is satisfied with his own Christianity is worse than a heathen. The man, who does not call himself a Christian but tries to follow His Master can not keep his mouth shut. He may make mistakes continuously; he may go to the gutter because he loses contact with the means of being a success in a world which is based on material foundations; he might even know that his acts are contrary to what Jesus has taught him... but he will be like a dog, who follows his master; sometimes snarling, sometimes biting him in the heels, but never thinking about the possibility of going his own way.

That is the Y: the shepherd dog running around the herd; sometimes bated by the sheep; sometimes beaten up by the shepherd, but always in action, never resting and always with one eye on His Master.

This picture is not exaggerated. I know it myself. I wish I could take you with me to the places I Galley Three Dick Schull Talk, saw the Y working among the people of this world. I wish I could show you the ways in which they try to reach the youth.

You should live one day in a hostel-palace of 2000 rooms in Chicago; you should spend some hours in the cool marble halls of the Y in Cairo; you should see the Bible classes in the little villages in Holland and in Germany. You would get tears in your eyes when you attended the distribution of a glass of milk and a bun to hungry children in the Arabian desert... and you would understand, you would experience what the Y is trying to do.

Trying to enter the life of people in all circumstances. Trying to open their hearts to the message of love which has sounded through the world from the moment that God punished Cain; always more clear, until 2000 years ago this message was given directly to us. And the Y does not do it by fighting wars; it does not organize political parties as strongholds for some church—as do the political parties in Europe; it does not try to conquer a world power in the name of Christianity... as some governments do; it just gives a glass of milk somewhere in the desert, a ball somewhere on a sports ground, a Bible somewhere in a little village.

I know that the Y is making mistakes. Day after day. I know that the Y.M.C.A. secretaries are incompetent to fulfill the tremendous task which they have to do; but I know that in this organization of 4,000,000 members there is a nucleus which simply tries to follow the Master. And only that is important.

Is the Y Needed?

And now I will conclude with a question. "Is there really no need of a Y.M.C.A. in this town?" My answer can be very short.

No—if the Y is only a service club, only a gymnastics class or a social agency with a recreational character.

Yes—if the Y wants to bring young people into contact with the spiritual life no matter of which denomination by the means it can offer.

Yes—if the Y is able to make people understand what it means to live with all the capacities man has been given in a perfect creation with brains to think clearly; with eyes to see the beauty of life and with a body to act dynamically.

Yes—if the Y.M.C.A. is able to bring the youth the conviction that they don't have their fingers only to handle mechanical devices; that they don't have their eyes only to look at exciting situations and that emotion is something different to sensation.

The Y has to have that chance in the following years. And it is up to the adult members to enable the Y to do these things. To give their capacities everybody in his own field—in an organization which is proud to be a bridge to the church, a gateway to a world of greater dimensions, a stimulus to more dynamic life and a union of workers in the service of Jesus Christ.

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