

Remarks prepared for delivery
by Governor Karl F. Rolvaag
Vasa Lutheran Home for Children Centennial Celebration
Vasa Lutheran Church
Red Wing, Goodhue County, August 29, 1965

Greetings and recognition of distinguished guests.

It is a pleasure to be here on this historic occasion—to join with you in honoring our forefathers—those pioneers who, as they broke the soil and faced the hardships of the frontier life, did not fail to recognize their responsibilities to their less-privileged brethren.

this centennial observance of the Vasa Children's House is moving evidence of man's continuing concern for helping others.

It is not only the first founders that we honor but all those who followed them—who carried the torch on through the decades of the 19th century and into the mid-20th century.

They were people of vision—those men and women who guided the destiny of the Vasa Home for Children. They remained alert to new needs, to changing times—to the kaleidoscopic pattern of human growth and development.

First they were led to provide a home for lonely orphaned children, a home which met an important need for many years,

As other needs emerged, the Vasa Home altered its pattern of service, and today it offers a program designed to meet the requirements of the severely handicapped, stent ally retarded child.

I am deeply moved by the words on the plaque presented to the home this afternoon: "One hundred years of service to children, every one precious in the sight of G o d . "

Yes, the Vasa Home has demonstrated two of the great characteristics of our society—the commitment to serve people in need, regardless of race, color, or creed, and the ability to change, in order to meet changing times and conditions.

This celebration today—and my presence here as your Governor—serves to remind us as well of another trait of our pluralist society:

The invaluable—the peculiarly American—partnership which exists between the church-supported agency and the tax-supported government—a partnership which, incidentally, has been refined to a particular degree here in the Midwest with our strong Scandinavian influences and heritage.

Not isolated from one another, but working as members of a team—the great institution of the church and the great experiment of self-government.

Your pastorate and your leaders are constantly and thoughtfully and most helpfully advising the leaders of government, of government welfare agencies, the policymakers, the legislators.

I am delighted to note, for example, the fact that Howard Paulson of the staff of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, is a member of our Mental Retardation Planning Council in Minnesota. As chairman of the task force which is studying residential facilities, Mr. Paulson has brought extensive background and resources to the confrontation of this problem.

There are others I could name, among them your outstanding executive director, The Reverend Luthard Gjerde. There is no way to measure the contribution of these people as they help shape government policies and help relate those policies to other social welfare endeavors. Only in this way are we enabled to weave a fabric of social service that will achieve our goal: the full development of each individual member of society, the sincere acceptance of each person's worth and dignity, the recognition that man is, indeed, created in the image of God.

I am confident that a nation, and a state, which has this healthy interchange between the public and the private social welfare programs will move forward with strength and purpose.

And, my friends, we have much to challenge us. Since taking office as Governor, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand how seriously, how tragically we have neglected the mentally handicapped children of our state.

Early in my administration, I sat down to plan for orderly visitations to our state-supported institutions for the mentally ill and the mentally retarded. I was shocked--all of the community leaders and legislators and others who joined me on the tours of the state institutions for the retarded were deeply shocked by, the conditions we observed.

We went to work with renewed determination and I am gratified to report to you that the results were remarkable.

The legislature set the challenge and sharp increases in appropriations were granted for daytime activity centers, for increased staff in the state institutions, for sheltered workshops, for expanded services in the mental health centers, and much more.

Currently, we are in the process of phasing into our three state institutions for the retarded 421 new employees. I cannot begin to tell you how much those workers are needed. Little children who can learn to help themselves have in the past been permitted to slowly deteriorate because there was no staff person to give them attention and guidance.

Active-hyperactive boys--who could not play out of doors because there was not sufficient staff to watch them and tend to them, will now be able to take advantage of the swings and the playground equipment which has for too long stood idle.

And in the community, we see a remarkable change in public attitudes and public responsibility. People are learning that the handicapped retarded youngster need not be shut away* He can learn--in special classes in school; he can learn social skills . in a daytime activity center. As a young adult, he can even learn to work at gainful employment--sometimes in a sheltered workshop, sometimes in private enterprise in a competitive situation.

Much that was once thought impossible is now within our grasp.

Still, there remains a tremendous job to be done.

The state institutions have a long way to go.

Some 6,000 youngsters are in special education classes in the public schools but there are estimated to be 16,000 who could benefit from such special education.

Public and community attitudes need to become more, tolerant--and here you church people can' lead the way.

But particularly pertinent for us today is the continuing problem of adequate residential care for the mentally retarded.

You have set an outstanding pattern with the Vasa Home. But will there continue to be an expanding role for the non-profit and the church-affiliated private residential facility in serving our mentally retarded and otherwise handicapped youngsters?

Will the state and the county governments enlarge their participation in this type of program, by financial reimbursement which is commensurate with the basic service provided by these non-profit institutions?

The fact is that there is absolutely no logic to the present manner of state participation in the cost of institutional care.

I refer to the fact that the state now pays almost the full cost of residential care for the mentally handicapped youngster while he is in a state institution. But if there is no place for him in a state institution, and he is in a home like the Vasa Borne, the county government pays almost the full cost.

Obviously, if the state pays full costs in a state institution but not in a private one, this acts as a deterrent to the growth of the church-related facility or the private small residential home. County welfare agencies are inclined to seek placement for handicapped youngsters in state institutions even though the residential facility in the community may be the more desirable placement for a particular type of child.

I need not point out to you the various factors which enter into this kind of a discussions the closeness to home, the personalized atmosphere, the little extras which volunteers in the community can provide--all of these tend to make small residential institutions particularly suitable to certain kinds of youngsters, as opposed to the immense and sometimes impersonalized atmosphere of a state institution.

We simply cannot permit our state laws to continue this inequitable financial pattern.

We must bring about full state participation in financial costs of high quality residential care for the retarded, whether that care is provided in a state owned and operated, or privately owned and operated facility.

In 1964 I named the Mantel Retardation Planning Council and asked it to develop a statewide plan to combat and treat mental retardation. I'm happy to report to you that it is doing a commendable job in this direction and I expect that it will complete its plan and submit it to me at the end of this year.

One of its chief recommendations will be to erase this present inequity relating to pay for residential care for the retarded.

Once we establish equity, I believe we can look for the development of a network of privately endowed or church-related small residential facilities, similar to yours here, with sound progress, and properly licensed. They will serve the mentally retarded youngsters who need total care, right in their home community rather than in isolation in some distant institution.

I would wish to add here that for many, the large state institution will continue to provide the very best kind of program of care. What we need and must have is both kinds of care, geared to provide programs suitable to the particular needs of the child.

My friends, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the work that you are doing in behalf of the mentally handicapped children of our state, for the invaluable service provided by your homes, both the Vasa Lutheran Home whose centennial we celebrate here today, and the Park Wild Rice Home in Fergus Falls*

When I see people like you joining together in firm dedication and in partnership with our state government to provide a home, a friendly receptive atmosphere, a well-equipped facility, a service which no one else can provide in the same way, I am renewed in my conviction that man can meet the challenge of modern society. You have done it, and you will continue to do it. I pledge to you my continuing cooperation in every way possible.