

Press not present

Offers 'positive response' to Nazis

by Ellen Herdeck

"What if you gave a peace demonstration and nobody came?"

This may have been a question occurring to members of the Niles Township clergy forum last Thursday when they unveiled their six-point plan to counter the proposed demonstration of the National Socialist Party (Nazi) in Skokie.

Only one suburban newspaper was represented at the clergy forum's press conference, and no representatives from Chicago papers or television stations were there to hear the group's proposals.

Rabbi Neil Brief of Niles Township Jewish Congregation, Skokie, and member

of the inter-denominational forum, said the plan was an outgrowth of "a relationship developed over the years"; adding that he was "saddened that the press is not here. I feel they are remiss in their duty."

Rabbi Carl Weiner of Skokie's Temple Judea added that "the press has mistakenly portrayed Skokie as a 'predominantly Jewish suburb'. They have found it newsworthy to spread the name of Skokie all over the world in connection with controversy and violence."

"Our plan has as much or more news value as that," Rabbi Weiner said, "Skokie is a truly American community,

where people of all beliefs live side-by-side without controversy or conflict."

"We want to make Skokie the capitol of brotherhood rather than the capitol of confrontation," he concluded.

The Rev. Harry Connor of Central United Methodist, Skokie, applauded his portrayal of the village, saying he hoped the forum would encourage "Jews, Protestants, Lutherans and Catholics to reach out to each other, creating dialogue, openness and a sense of fairness and optimism."

What the forum viewed as a "positive response" to the proposed Nazi demonstration are plans for:

1) An open air worship service led by Christians and Jews Sunday, April 16, at 3 pm at Niles West high school stadium;

2) Encouraging the wearing of armbands with the Star of David, provided by the National conference of Christians and Jews, on the day of the demonstration;

3) Simultaneous prayer and worship in churches and synagogues on the day of the demonstration;

4) Clergy presence at first aid or police stations in case the demonstration is held;

5) A series of Christian-Jewish Bible studies conducted April 2-23 on successive Sunday evenings at St. Peters United Church of Christ; and

6) Cooperation and participation in Remembrance Week (April 15-22), proclaimed by Skokie Mayor Albert Smith.

Symbolizing what the forum would try to

achieve was a mural created by The Rev. Thomas O'Connor of Skokie's United Church of Christ.

"The design is enclosed in a circle, representing eternity," Rev. O'Connor said, "with the rainbow symbolizing the covenant of Noah, earth and water representing creation, the cross a Christian symbol and the star of David, Jewish."

Also present at the meeting was a member of the Cantors association of America, who said his colleagues would come to the prayer meeting.

"We will be united in song. Music knows no theology," he said.

Twelve members of the clergy forum were present at the conference, including coordinators, Rev. Connor, Rev. O'Connor, Rev. Louise Mahan, Central Methodist; Rev. John Mittermaier, and Rev. Richard Schleup, Trinity Lutheran, Skokie; Rev. Warren Thummel, St. Timothy's Lutheran, Skokie and The Rev. Dr. Lee Gallman, Crawford avenue Baptist, Skokie.

Rabbi Weiner said the clergy forum was organized 20 years ago, and for the last 15 years, the group had a sporadic history of strong cooperation among churches and synagogues.

"Interest in the township organization waxed and waned according to an interest in a denominational versus community approach," he said.